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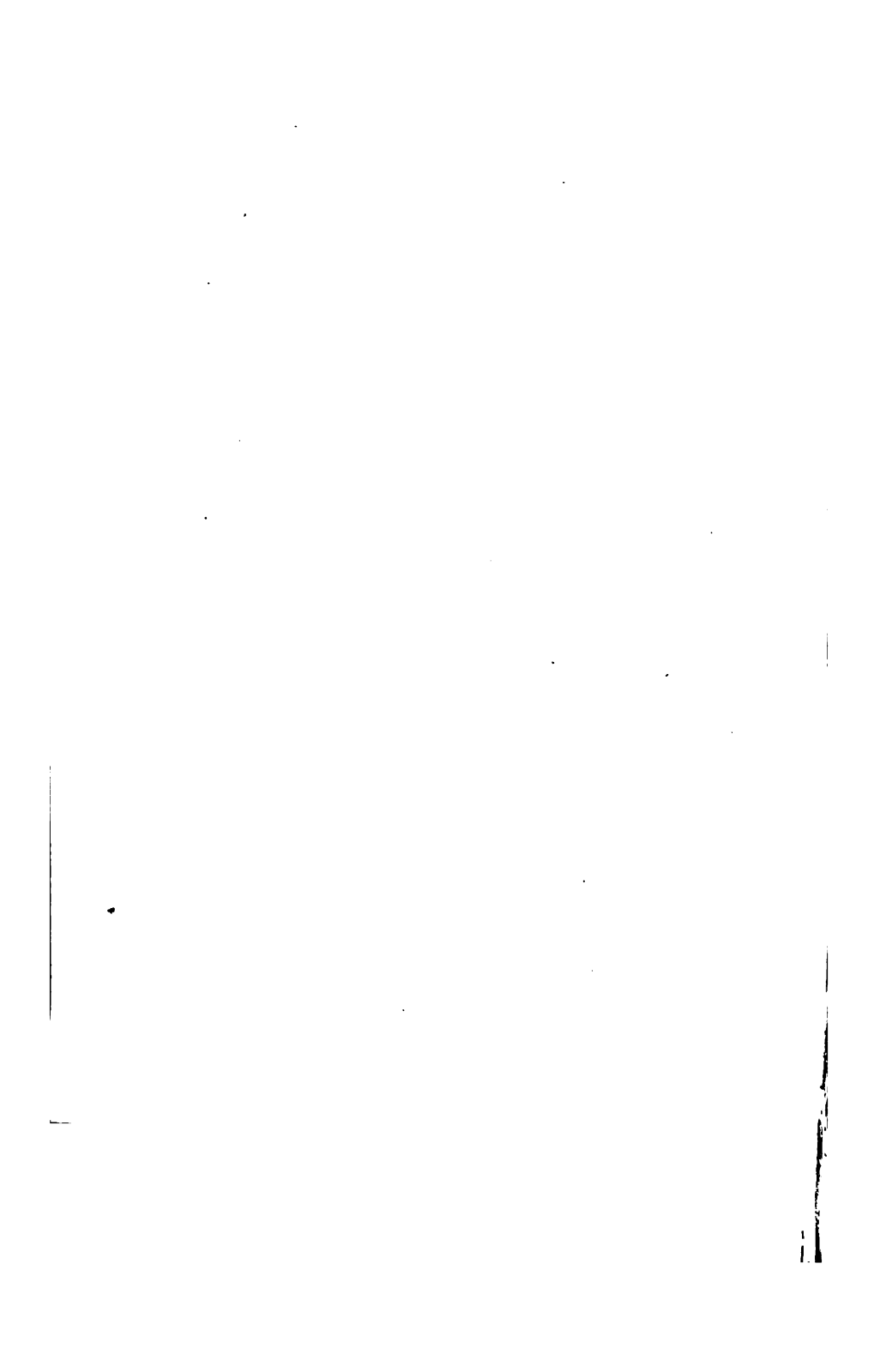
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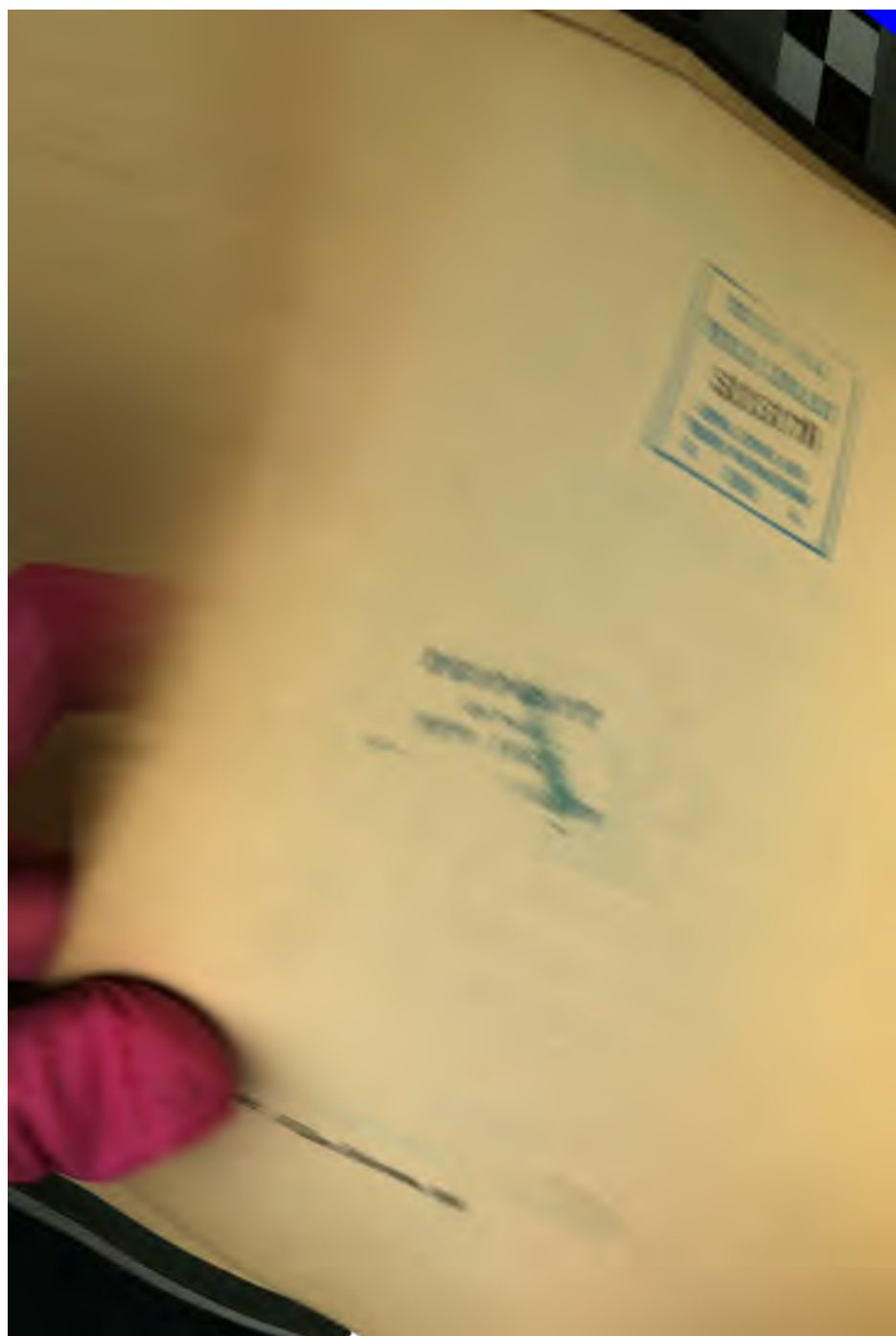
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# Things that are Cæsar's

By

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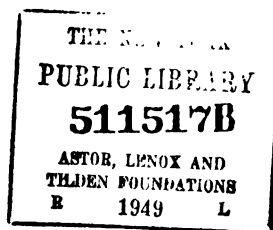


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## CHAPTER I

'THE question of play-going is one that has been treated differently in different ages,' said the Dean of Cayle. 'The current morality of the time of Charles the Second——'

'That has nothing to do with the case—nothing whatever,' said his wife. She looked round the room for signs of agreement. 'Play-going is a thing about which there may be two opinions; in the present case there can be only one.'

At the end of a discussion twenty minutes long, and all about the general moral aspect of a theatre, this sweeping away of issues might have seemed to a stranger to be overbold. Yet the Dean did not protest. Mr. Upworth nodded approbation. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, if she tossed her head impatiently, grew in pugnacity only because the crux of the discussion was approaching.

'Do you want another cup of tea, Eva, before we quarrel?' she asked.

Studios readers of a certain London daily paper may remember that in February and March in the year nineteen hundred and three there was a correspondence in its columns under the heading, 'Are Theatres Brutalizing?' The web was large—so large that flies of every kind were entangled: flies moral, flies philosophic, flies democratic, and even flies artistic. But few of those who were attracted by the blithering rage of 'X.Y.Z.' and the deft swordsmanship of 'Decency' will have remembered what gave rise to so much sport. They will have forgotten to connect it with the Western Midland town of Cayle, in which, beneath the old cathedral towers and the new smoking chimneys of the factories, the root of the dis-

cussion was to be found. Should there or should there not be a popular cheap theatre to amuse the working classes of Cayle ?

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, of the Primrose League, was the widow of a man who had been Mayor of Cayle—the kind of Mayor who does not so much aspire as condescend to his interesting office. She had achieved an intimacy with the cream of local society. She knew the clerical people, the manufacturing magnates, and the professional classes. Day by day, from three o'clock onwards, not only the women of Cayle, but even the husbands and sons, came to drink her tea and eat her cakes. She was a provincial institution. And she, for her part, had given ten pounds and her tongue to the cause of the proposed theatre. The Dean was another who had subscribed ; but Mrs. Russell, his wife, was in the opposite camp, as was Mr. Upworth, who brought the prestige of a long-established firm of solicitors to support the cause of public safety. Consequently there was dissension in Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's drawing room.

Mr. Upworth put down his teacup and crossed his legs.

'I was having luncheon with the Willoughbys yesterday,' he said, and paused. 'Now, if only Henry Willoughby would make himself responsible for the theatre, treating it on lines of decency, as a charity——'

'But he won't,' said Mrs. Russell.

'Because, after all, there are plays and plays,' the solicitor continued ; 'and Henry Willoughby is a man I could trust, though he is so young.'

They smiled. Had he pronounced in those weighty tones that the Archbishop of Canterbury had a *prima-facie* claim to respectability, that would not have been an opinion more insipid than this. It was a law of Nature that Henry Willoughby was to be trusted. Then Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet rose to magnificent daring, and tore aside the veil of the dispute.

'The fact of the matter is that you don't care whether the theatre is good or bad. All you care for is to abuse Charley Brandon.' Charley Brandon was the author of the theatre scheme.

There it was, naked and undeniable, for them to deal with as they pleased. And it was certainly a little unfair on the part of Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet. For twenty minutes they had kept their tongues off this particular aspect of the question in deference to her extraordinary prejudice, and now she made their very forbearance a cause of complaint. The Dean had been wiping his spectacles; he now replaced them hurriedly, ready for all emergencies. A shade of disgust passed over Mr. Upworth's face. Mrs. Russell sighed in sheer weariness.

'My dear, what a threadbare subject!' she exclaimed.

The Dean remarked that every subject is considered threadbare by those who have had all the talk on their side.

'It's too bad,' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, 'the way that boy has been treated since he left Oxford. Don't you think so, Dr. Russell?'

'He has not exactly courted popularity,' the Dean answered.

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, who had the status of a grandmother, observed that she had known the young man in question since he was a motherless baby in long clothes, had nursed him, watched him, talked to him, and was convinced that nothing but kindness was wanted to bring his good heart to light. A reprobate is never wholly lost to those who watched him in his cradle. But Mrs. Russell smiled in perfect assurance beneath her violet toque. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum.*

'If you will forgive my saying it,' Mr. Upworth remarked, 'those who only hear what is said in drawing-rooms can have no just view of such a man as Lord Charles. You must take it from me that Cayle is not wrong in looking askance at him.'

'I expect him to come in every minute,' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, looking, not at the clock, but at Mr. Upworth: for it was a retort, a rebuke, levelled with asperity at one who hit below the belt. The inference was that none but the respectable would be seen in Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's drawing-room.

The subject dropped, necessarily, after Mr. Upworth's treatment of it, and for some minutes conversation ranged

over trifles. Indeed, they were like an audience before the rise of the curtain. If the town's black sheep was to come among them, the interest of expectation was overwhelming, both for friend and foe. Consider the possibilities. He might come smelling of brandy ; he might say something perfectly fearful. Young Willoughby, they knew, was coming too ; but it is an injustice of life, reflected in this and every history, that the bad excite much more interest than the good.

So, when next the butler opened the door, four eager faces met him. Which was it ? It was both.

'Mr. Henry Willoughby and Lord Charles Brandon,' he said, thus delicately giving precedence to personal over titular distinction. That Henry Willoughby should have a reputation great and fair in Cayle was not wonderful to any person having eyes. There walked into the room an excellent specimen of what can be produced by the greatest of public schools and Universities—a masterpiece cast in iron. If his face had faults, they were in its angular outlines and in a certain rigidity about the lines of his delicately-curved mouth. These very faults did but increase the appearance of strength. His dark eyes gleamed with more than average brightness ; masses of dark-brown hair were carefully brushed away from his fine forehead. He was tall, straight, well-proportioned, and well-groomed, standing above the other youth four inches in height and more than a year in age.

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, large, brisk, and capable, rose and confronted her visitors with that fixity of mouth and chin which marked her among women, and won her more respect than even her deftly-wielded lorgnettes. It did not escape notice that she greeted Willoughby with something less than the warmth she had for the fair-haired youth with him, who, with languid air and clothes that seemed suggestive of the stable, was the branded reprobate of Cayle.

'Now, I expect you two have been having a political quarrel on the road,' said the hostess, as she poured out tea in dashing style. 'You have come into a den of lions, Charley ; you are the only Liberal here.'

'Am I?' said he, looking mildly round the room.

'Come, you're too slack to be a Liberal to-day,' the Dean remarked, as he held out a plate. 'Have a sandwich?'

Brandon looked grateful, and Willoughby began to explain the complicated causes of his coming to tea so late. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, bewildered but forgiving, waited her chance to signal Brandon to a place on the sofa beside her.

'You're not looking well, Charley,' she said. 'Why is that?'

The maternal solicitude was meant, as acts of kindness sometimes are, not only to gratify the friend, but to annoy the foe. Mr. Upworth, not being concerned with Brandon's health, inquired of Willoughby if he had enjoyed the Bishop's dinner yesterday, and this topic, catching up the Dean, divided the room into two. Mrs. Russell remained silent on guard by the sofa.

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet had some cause to inquire for Brandon's health. He looked languid, pale, and ill. The uncharitable would have called him dissipated, for his large blue eyes were not so clear as eyes should be at twenty-two, and he looked as if he had forgotten how to smile.

'I've been a bit sleepy for the last month or two,' he told her. 'I'm like that animal, a beetle or something, which sleeps all the winter and wakes all the summer.'

'And when will you wake?'

'I've set the alarum for next month. The Oxford people come down, you know, and I shall fill the house in town.'

'And in the meantime,' Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet said severely, 'you are living mostly in the stables.'

He smiled, with a boyish confession of guilt that was reserved for friends.

'There's peace in the stables.'

'What does Alice say?' asked his hostess.

'Alice says lots of things.'

'And you hang about the slums?'

'My work among the poor,' he answered impudently.

'Teaching little boys to smoke. Oh, Charley, it's disgraceful!'

'They taught me when I was small,' he said, 'and now I return the compliment. Their cigarettes were bad, and mine are good: good for evil, you know.'

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet shook her head.

'Some more tea?' she asked. 'You look as if you needed it strong.'

'Tell me about tea,' he said. 'Aren't you very fond of it? Tell me if you think it a wholesome drink for the women of England, or if you think it is like drinking some of Henry Willoughby—more stimulating than nourishing.'

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet had not said a dozen words upon this favourite subject before the talk was engulfed in a commotion that arose on the other side of the fireplace. It was impossible not to listen and watch. The Dean and Mr. Upworth sat, looking rather scared, before Willoughby, who towered in front of them with eyes ablaze, one hand raised as if about to descend emphatically upon the teacup which the other hand still faithfully held in the midst of all. It was evident that Willoughby was shocked.

'An ineffective Minister!' he cried. 'I never thought I should hear such words from any Conservative. If you call it ineffective to have stood for all these years for everything that is best in English life, I don't agree with you. He has been the guardian of society, the——'

'Who is it? Who is it?' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, breaking in.

'The Dean has called Lord Salisbury an ineffective Minister,' said Willoughby, goaded to fresh passion by the bare repetition of the phrase. 'I hope you do not agree with him. I can't understand how any Conservative could make such an assertion about such a magnificent statesman. Why, half the things in England to-day that are worthy of our reverence owe their continued existence to Lord Salisbury.'

'Yes, I suppose that's true,' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet.

'Nevertheless,' said the Dean, apologetic, but un-

ruffled, 'I think there is something in what I said. You see, if Lord Salisbury stood for anything, it was for an energetic foreign policy, and for keeping the drag on the wheel at home. But it generally seemed to end in graceful concessions abroad, and often in rather ungraceful ones to the democratic party at home.'

Willoughby spread out his hands in a gesture of despair, and had no time to notice Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's offer of more tea.

'But would you have it otherwise?' he said. 'I hope no man admires firmness more than I, but in my opinion one cannot go on for ever meeting popular demands with an unbending refusal. That is not what I call statesmanship.'

Mr. Upworth threw in a hearty approval of this sentiment.

'No,' said Willoughby; 'the model of the Conservative party, the classic instance of wisdom on these matters, is the conduct of the Duke of Wellington in the terrible days of 1832. He told the lords to yield. And when we look back across the vista of years that lies between us and the Iron Duke, we are bound to confess that but for that advice of his there might to-day be no House of Lords at all. Time has shown the wisdom of his policy. It has shown that sometimes there comes a crisis when the Conservatives must yield, or a revolution will result. Lord Salisbury understood this, and he is worthy of the highest honour for so doing.'

Then the Dean's face assumed an expression which is the English substitute for a shrug of the shoulders.

'I don't call that a very glorious prospect for a great party,' he said. 'Are we for ever to preach in the realm of ideas a doctrine whose realization we are perpetually to abandon in the realm of things? I know I could not be a good Churchman if I believed my creed was to be treated like that—stultified stage by stage under pressure of an inevitable force. To me there is an intolerable sadness and weakness about it all. It does not satisfy me.'

'Then I pity you,' said Willoughby; and thereupon his emotion gripped him. Never had English patriot such

an opportunity as that which his eloquence unfolded. The Spanish Armada, Napoleon, Kruger, were paltry foes compared with those whom he foresaw. For these were foes cherished in the country's bosom ; selfishness and rapine were at work. It appeared that Church, peers, land, navy, army, were in danger. Even the sanctity of contract was approached by unhallowed hands. An unnatural equalization was made the watchword of the unenlightened masses. Against such dangers, vividly described, it was the mission of Conservatives to bear the historic flag of England. For his part, Willoughby asked no better lot. 'Concessions we may have to make, as Lord Salisbury knew. We must surrender small things to save great things. But do you suppose our conceptions become less high because of this ? No, the intrinsic grandeur of the cause will save us. We live in grand times.'

Willoughby ceased talking, and folded his hands in front of him as he stood, his gaze fixed on the red sky through the window. Evidently the meditative tone of his last sentence was the genuine product of a meditative mood. On the other persons in the room his eloquence produced effects that varied with the natural leanings of the listener, but were in each case powerful. Mr. Upworth had nothing but admiration unalloyed. The Dean was not fond of sermons, except from the pulpit, and would have been guilty of a flippant answer had there been one good enough to hand. He was sure there was some better defence for his party than that of Willoughby's oration, and he wondered what it was. He was sixty-four, and politics had always been his hobby. His wife sat smiling, enjoying the play of Willoughby's fine eyes. Brandon had the strong tea inside him, and it seemed, as Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet had expected, that this was already making war on his indifferent indolence of mind and manner. But the process did not appear to be pleasant. The muscles of his forehead and his mobile mouth were caught by a series of nervous contractions. He stared at the fire, not at Willoughby, like the others. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet knew his symptoms, and wondered

whether he would begin to talk or leave the house at once with the roughest of good-byes. She herself was pleased by Willoughby's eloquence. It did honour to her house.

'I always think,' she said, sincerely enough, 'that personalities are far the most interesting things in politics. I admire Lord Salisbury because he is so Elizabethan.'

Mr. Upworth then contributed a brief quotation about the spacious times of great Elizabeth, which made it rather difficult for anyone to follow him. But Willoughby was never daunted by such things.

'It is perfectly true,' he said, 'that much more importance attaches to what a statesman is than to what he does. History has no finer picture than that of the grand old nobleman at Hatfield sitting serene while aimless democracy tossed itself hither and thither around him.'

The Dean thought it unwise to call democracy aimless. They would have Brandon making retorts about people who live in glass houses.

'Also, I am not at all sure that my admiration is caught by the serene nobleman sitting in state at Hatfield, if you mean that figure to represent the Conservative party.'

At that moment it seemed as if Brandon's uneasiness were really to relieve itself in speech; but Willoughby was before him, crying out:

'Why not? Why not? To my mind no figure could be nobler.'

'Because,' said the Dean, 'I ask myself how long we can continue that policy of sitting still at Hatfield while the democracy tosses itself about outside. Is that a policy with which to face the future?'

'The future must be faced with courage,' said Willoughby.

'Hear, hear!' said Mr. Upworth.

'No one disputes that,' the Dean continued; 'but I am not satisfied. I grant you that our party has a policy in Imperial matters, and a great policy, too.'

'We are the guardians of the flag,' cried Willoughby.

'Yes, yes; but what is going to happen at home? No reasonable man can doubt that democracy, as you call it, will advance and force us to make more and more of those

at length and in self-defence on the state of the party organization in the borough. His right to do so was unquestionable. He had an expert knowledge of the state of the agent's books and of the condition of the Primrose League, the Constitutional Club, the Conservative Association, and all the other ganglia of Conservatism in the town of Cayle. Brandon stood shuffling his feet like a stable-boy, and took the first decent chance of saying good-bye. Apart from other motives, he was half dead for want of tobacco.

'A curious boy,' said the Dean. For it was a characteristic of Cayle society that when you left the room you were not forgotten. You could withdraw as a talker, but not as a topic.

'A strange mixture of dulness and flashiness,' said Willoughby.

'Little better than a Socialist,' said Mrs. Russell, 'in his politics.'

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, however, declared it would not surprise her if the Dean were right, and he should end his career as a Conservative Prime Minister.

'He has the highest degree of personal charm when he chooses to use it.'

'I hope you are wrong,' said Willoughby, coming forward to say good-bye. 'I have no very high opinion of Brandon, but I should be sorry to think him capable of an act of tergiversation.'

## CHAPTER II

WILLOUGHBY contrived to escape from Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's house before the departure of the Dean and Mrs. Russell—a tactical move which gave him the advantage of walking home alone. And as he walked he thought.

One of the first practical classifications of thought is this : some people direct their minds, and others let their minds direct themselves. Some people think actively, and some passively. In the case of Willoughby the active element predominated greatly. As he walked home from Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's, he threw up his head and drew in deep long breaths of the evening air, because he knew it was good for his lungs, and his mind was driven at high pressure. He had heard great news. Of course, he did not forget to observe how many minutes it took him to walk the half-mile along the tow-path, nor to stop at Mrs. Dawson's to inquire for the sick child. He could, on reaching home, have told of a hundred small things he had noticed on his way, for alert observation was his intellectual forte, and he knew it. Yet he was driving his mind like a racer at the last curve, with whip and spur and stimulating platitudes. Few minds could have borne the strain, but Willoughby all the year round had his whole intellectual stock set out like the figures in a banker's books, and at any moment he could pounce on the item he required. It was delightful for him. It had carried him triumphantly through every examination he had met, and they were many. In the shortest imaginable time he could add up all his columns, and be sure of the state of his balance ; the only doubt he knew was doubt as to fact. He was sure that Sir Benjamin Mason would

not resign immediately, because Sir Benjamin was a good party man, and would not leave his post till the end of the session. He would tell his father about it to-night, having begged a few minutes strictly private conversation. Here occurred a break in the chain of ideas to give him time for thanking God who had given him such a father. Then soon he would see Sir Benjamin and ask advice. ('Look before you leap.') After that he would lose no time in seeing the principal party men in the borough. ('A stitch in time saves nine.') Upworth, he knew, would be in favour of sending for some barrister from London; but that could be met by saying that he himself was a barrister, called two months ago. Besides, a local man would be best, much more likely to win votes in a place like Cayle, where everyone knew everyone else. ('Charity begins at home.') That argument could be used with the central Unionist Council in London. Ah! the steeplejacks are up St. Mary's spire—a dangerous trade. Doubtless the Liberals would put up some man against him, but if he trusted in God and kept his powder dry, he would have the Liberals made his footstool. Nevertheless, all precautions must be taken. ('There's many a slip,' etc.) Now, what was the precise state of things in the trades, in the factories, among the residents? What were the figures Dacre had given him?

Such was the mind of Willoughby, the obedient mind, that is at the beck and call of an active will. The mind of the rival youth was as different as could be. Elusive, unruly, irrational, and swift, at one moment it sulked, at another it teased; at another it would suddenly open its arms and cover its possessor with sumptuous caresses, whispering secrets that thrilled his heart and drove his blood.

Walking home from Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's, he found it in a mood of merciless teasing. The talk in the drawing-room had roused his evil spirit, his vast, vague devil of restlessness, and he wished for nothing in the world but peace. This tumult of emotions, primitive hatred and mad jealousy, doubt, resentment, the instinct of self-expression, all so vague that he could not have found a

rational basis for a single one—these were not of his seeking. He beat them back as a home-loving child rejects and banishes the thought of school. Why could he not be left to make mud-pies in his garden? So he said now. Yet he knew that there were times when these same sensations bounded like wine through his being, making life and joy. The present, however, was not such a time. He puffed furiously at his pipe, and ground together the coins in his pockets. His way to Vitryfield, his father's house, lay by the old town wall and the Deanery; but he turned off to the left into the web of slums at the back of the cathedral. Like Willoughby, he tried to give the word of command to his mind, and order it, not, indeed, to activity, but to peace. As well might he have cried peace to winds and rains.

He arrived at the steps of a tumbledown house in Mercy Lane, where all around him children of no particular age or sex played and screamed and jabbered, and enjoyed, when it was possible, the luxury of food. Two or three boys had seized him a little way down the street, and asked him for a cigarette; so he had let them empty his case. Two girls came and begged for a pocket-handkerchief, which was refused. One boy complained that his cigarette had been taken from him by another. He demanded justice.

'Which is the biggest?' said Brandon.

'He is,' said the boy.

'Which is the strongest?'

'He is.'

'Then he must have it,' said Brandon. 'Better luck next time.'

He knocked at the door which stood crazily at the top of the five stone steps of the house. A girl of nine opened it.

'Is Mrs. Williams in?' he asked.

'No, m'lord.'

'Is the old lady in?'

'No, m'lord.'

'Where's Dusky?'

'Don't know, m'lord.'

'Is to-day Saturday? Any meat for dinner to-morrow?'

The girl's face fell.

'Mother says she can't buy any meat to-night.'

Brandon brought a coin from his pocket and gave it to her. Then a baby began to cry within the house, and the girl ran off. Brandon shut the door and walked away, disappointed in his hopes of finding amusement at a house where he had passed many dreamy silent hours of listening and peace.

He walked through the slums into the market square, and down the High Street, where he cut several people whom a recognition would have pleased, and several who said that to be cut by him was the only compliment he could bestow.

How he hated Willoughby! But how tiresome was hatred! In Willoughby he saw the representation of everything abominable in mind and morals; yet Willoughby knew what he wanted, and would probably get it. He himself, on the other hand, knew what he might get, and did not know whether he wanted it or not. As soon as the news of Sir Benjamin's retirement should reach his father's ears, he knew that he would be asked, pressed, commanded, to put himself forward as Liberal candidate for the borough seat in Parliament. Was this what he wanted? Should he be a politician? At any rate, it would annoy the people of Oxford and Cayle. Politics would be perhaps a relief, certainly a novelty. For it was not as a political effort that he twice without success attempted to be president of the Oxford Union. That was a personal matter, more for his friends' amusement than for his own. A political game would be something new, with much that was hateful.

So much of the position could he spy, so much of his mind could he read and handle; but even as he did so, he collided with those shapeless masses of emotion which cumbered and clogged his mental machinery and made his thought a nightmare. What was it all, and why could he not logically treat all questions as they separately came to hand? What was Willoughby to him, or

politics, or odious politicians, or their cant ? Where was peace, and by what artifice could he secure it ?

Passing through the land that his father had withdrawn from the grasp of the builder, he came to the great gates of Vitryfield, his home. Half-way across the park he hesitated, for he came to the turning that leads to the stables, and the need for relaxation gripped him. But he decided on relaxation of another sort. There, in front of him, was the great gray battlemented house his people built two hundred years ago, and within it was something better, after all, than the horses and the grooms. He walked through the gardens, and entered the house by a side-door which led to a servants' staircase, and by way of this he reached his bedroom. It was past seven o'clock. He changed his clothes rapidly. He put on a round jacket, and if any people came to dinner they could think what they liked, as usual. Out into the corridor he went, stopped at another door, and knocked.

The room which he then entered at the word of bidding was a bedroom, very pink and white, without a bedroom's stiffness. Chairs, tables, books, in satisfactory disorder, told of a room that was, if only for the last hours of the day, a home. Many pictures were on the walls and tables, and portraits, among which there came most often the faces of a dark woman and a fair boy. The first was the long-dead mistress of the house, and the other, here well brushed and oiled, in Eton clothes, here on horseback, there as sitting for an Oxford photographer, was Brandon. The room was brilliantly lighted. A bright fire was burning. By the fire was a tall mirror, into which there gazed a girl of three-and-twenty years, as she sat in patience for her maid to dress her hair.

She, when she saw that it was Brandon who had knocked at her door, dismissed her maid, and forgot her duty to her hair. She poked the fire, saying nothing. As Brandon to the casual observer was artistically the product of the stable, so this, his sister, was from the drawing-rooms of a great city. Her face had learned the art of self-control. She was the only daughter of Lord Wight, and mistress in his house. Her lips had said

things brilliant and things proud ; but her eyes were the soft brown eyes of the picture on the walls, and still, when angry with her brother, she reverted to a girlish sulkiness.

He, drawing up an armchair, sprawled upon it by the fire. He lighted a cigarette.

'I'm going to smoke,' he said, 'and if you object, you can send me out of the room.'

'You know I don't object to your smoking,' she answered.

'I've been to tea at Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's,' he said.

'And before that you spent the whole day in the stables.'

'Well, more or less.'

She said nothing, but sat down again and applied herself to the business of her hair.

'If you object,' said Brandon wearily, 'please state your objections, and state whether they are moral, social, or personal, and whether best met by argument or epigram.'

But she would not do so. She confined herself to an adroit grunt, knowing that her brother respected her prejudices, but would massacre her reasons.

'I'm in a savage temper, Alice,' he drawled, 'so if you're going to bully me I'll go.'

She laid her comb on her lap, and the annoyance went out of her face.

'Dearest, I won't bully you,' she said. 'Tell me what has made you savage.'

'I went to Mrs. P.-M.'s,' he said. 'I found that fool Upworth there, and the Dean. Poor old Dean ! I like him a good deal better than he likes me. And Henry Willoughby was there, spitting morality between every two ticks of the clock. He's really rather like a coal-heaver in his ways, Alice. He interlards his conversation with moral expletives, just as a coal-heaver says "bloody" before every other noun.'

'Oxford has done him a shocking amount of harm,' said she. 'He used to be a fairly nice boy, and now he's detestable.'

'Oxford was the occasion, not the cause,' said Brandon.

Alice remembered her hair, glad to have found a sufficient cause for her brother's gloomy mood. She continued the great work.

'I met him the other day at the Russells,' she said, 'and he stood over me and poured out platitudes till I nearly screamed, because I knew he thought I agreed with everything he said. It is a libel on one's intelligence, really. What are you to say when a person tells you that wireless telegraphy is a marvellous invention. You can't say it isn't.'

Brandon's listless manner left him as he answered her.

'Look here,' he said, 'that's all very well. But what makes me mad is that I know he's a better man than I am.'

'Did he tell you so?' said she, in soft mockery.

All the indolence had gone from Brandon's manner, all the distress from his face. He spoke vigorously, with his eyes fixed on the fire, making tiny gestures with the hand that held his cigarette.

'Nothing of the sort,' he said. 'Nobody told me. I saw it. The fact is, you see, I've rather a lot to tell you. The Dean burst a bomb on the drawing-room floor by telling us that Mason is going out of Parliament—going at once. I suppose it will be in a month or two. It was a damned dramatic scene, you see, because there was Willoughby and there was I, and it's quite on the cards that he and I will be the rival candidates at the election. It was the first we'd either of us heard of it. Well, Willoughby was on it like a knife. He got up, more or less thinking aloud, and spouted out all the facts and figures about everything in the borough, everyone's opinions, and where all the influence was to be found, and all the rest of it. That's not much in itself, perhaps, but the whole thing showed what a man of action he is.'

'But, Charley, he's so stupid,' said the jealous sister.

'He hasn't the intellect of a hen,' said Brandon. 'Yet there it is: he knows precisely what he wants, and he knows the best way of getting it. He's a practical politician, so far as electioneering goes. And what am I?'

'An amateur, dear, who could pick up as much skill in three weeks as Henry Willoughby has got in three years.'

'Skill's no good unless you've got the will to use it,' he replied. 'I came away like an idiot. My head was like fermented treacle, stodgy and restless all at once. That's not the way of a man of action. I tell you what it is, Alice : people who like me call me a sportsman, and people who hate me call me a stable-boy ; but as a matter of fact I'm neither one nor the other. I'm simply a student, a bookworm, with a discontented wish to shine in a sphere that is beyond me—only I've not got the pluck. I've done nothing in my life but read books and dream dreams, and now I'm coming to feel the pinch.'

What did it matter if dinner and guests were kept waiting ? Alice had found important work.

'You must agree to stand when father proposes it,' she said—'you must indeed. Your mind has been rotting, decaying, for months. You must have something to do.'

'Damn it ! I've no politics,' he said.

It was not worth while to contradict what they both knew to be a lie. There had been a time when the mountains were in travail, and a statesman of the highest rank had called the faithful to his banner. The young Brandon, at Oxford, was among those faithful. His friends thought that he would be born again. But it was an episode. It was proved that to plough the lonely furrow was to plough the sands, and disappointment came to Brandon as to others. For the rest, what was he but the political and personal dependent of the orthodox Liberalism of Lord Wight ?

'Why, think of it !' he burst out, with passion fit for Willoughby ; 'who are the people I should have to work with ? Who are they here in Cayle ? Just think of them. Half a dozen maniacs who object to vaccination. A pack of medieval Inquisitors stamping and spitting with rage because they can't burn innkeepers alive. A couple of old women who want to have all young men locked up at eight o'clock. Someone who thinks the Lord Chancellor's salary too large. A pompous committee who were inspired in a dream to abolish street-betting or ping-pong or sealskin jackets. One irascible pedagogue who uses

his position as Bishop to pass off what he reads in the gutter press as the political opinions of God. People who pamper their bloated consciences by turning the cheek of England to the smiter from abroad. Philosophic pedants, moral dyspeptics, cranks and fanatics, everyone lusting after his neighbour's blood. 'Pon my word, I call myself a Liberal, but I declare I'm ashamed to confess it except behind bolts and bars.'

And yet, as Alice pointed out, even if their father were to die and leave them free, they must still be either Liberals or Tories. Would Charley be a Tory?

'Willoughby is a Tory,' he answered; and into that name it was easy for Alice to read every righteous dame and pompous citizen, every sleek parson and hearty, healthy youth of muscle and convention, in the nostrils of whom the name of Brandon had stunk from the day he put on breeches until now. The home of Toryism was in the drawing-rooms of Cayle, and Alice knew that something besides paternal wrath made Toryism a thing beyond the pale.

'I've stumbled on politics out of science and philosophy,' he told her, 'and I've found there's no place in politics for a Jingo Socialist.'

It was useless to press him further at such a time.

'You are a terrible idealist,' she said, to close the talk, 'though you do like to be thought a cynic.'

He laughed.

'I suppose a cynic is only an idealist who knows his ideal to be unattainable.'

'Surrender the ideal,' she said.

'Then I should have to surrender the cynicism, and what should I be then?'

'I don't know. A practical person.'

'An opportunist,' said Brandon.

Alice turned her eyes on his, half serious. half amused.

'If only you'd be an opportunist, Charley! You'd make such a clever one.'

'We're talking nonsense,' he said. He got up and stood on the hearthrug. His energy had all drained out

through his eyes into the fire at which he had been gazing as he talked. He smiled and yawned.

'What an unholy time for a conversation—between dressing and dinner : in breach of all our rules !'

'The Bishop has dismissed his chaplain for saying that rules are made to be broken,' said Alice, standing ready to leave the room.

But Brandon pointed out that he would have been nearer the truth had he said that they were made for fools to keep.

## CHAPTER III

ONE day when March was drawing to a close Matilda Williams announced to the inmates of 17, Mercy Lane that the baby was asleep. The baby seldom slept, but now there was peace within the wooden box or cradle in the corner, from which so many wails and moans proceeded. Matilda went and sat on the high window-sill by the jar of everlasting flowers to watch the affairs of the lane. Old Mrs. Hedge laid down her knitting for a while ; •perhaps she, too, would sleep. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Mrs. Williams stood darning a sock in the doorway that led from the front room to the little scullery behind it, and children numbers seven and eight were playing with mud and sticks in the yard beyond.

The furniture in the room was old, but it was serviceable, purchased forty years ago by the prosperous old artisan whose funeral was recorded on the card above the mantelpiece. It was from him that the present Williams inherited the tall clock, the table, the cupboard, the two horsehair armchairs, and the sofa, which made it difficult to force the door more than half-way open. The cupboard was rather empty, the clock would not work, and the life had gone from the springs of the sofa and chairs ; but all these things had happened in recent times. The fireplace was big and homely, quite the most pleasing thing the room contained. Cleanliness, perhaps, was not a notable feature of the room, but some good fairy had given to the Williams family the most valuable ornament ever found in the homes of the poor—the habit of living with open doors and windows.

Into this room, after permission punctiliously asked, came Henry Willoughby and his mother to make a district

visitor's call. They were greeted most respectfully, and they proceeded without loss of time to make the usual inquiries as to the health of the family and the improvement of their affairs. Of course, things never have improved with the working classes since the world began, and goodness only knows what they will come to in the end. Something like enthusiasm lit up the pinched gray face of Mrs. Williams as she began the catalogue of her increasing woes. Her poor husband! That was a prolific source of talk. They had him shaved last Monday week by a neighbour, but now his beard was growing over his chin. There he lay in his bed, sunrise to sunset, and him so active in the past. His complaint was internal.

'I must send him some soup,' said Mrs. Willoughby, in solution of all difficulties.

'And him as has been the man he has been,' Mrs. Williams continued. 'There's Lord Charles Brandon, he says to me, "It do seem a shame, Mrs. Williams," he says, "that a man like Williams should get no pay from Parliament, who has been respectable all these years in and out, and gone sick for never no fault of his own, and all these children brought up first-rate with the money earned with the sweat of his brow. There's the King feeding folks as are sent to prison for stealing and the like," says Lord Charles Brandon, "and never a penny for Williams, as has laboured honest and profitable all these years, and brought up his children right and fair, and out of work for no fault of his own."'

Could Willoughby be blamed if he put his back to the fire and opened the mouth of the presumptive Conservative candidate? It was not he who had introduced the political topic so early in the day. But his prudent mother knew that only those who sow can reap, and she asked to see the baby. She said the proper things. The restless mind of Willoughby, checked thus at the outset, drove him to wander round the room and inspect the furniture, the pictures, and the ornaments. You could see him saying to himself, 'How curious and instructive is the life of the poor!'

Once more they were back in the topic of bad times.

'It's not much help that comes along,' said Mrs. Williams, 'except from the castle. There's the Vicar, he comes and says how God helps them as helps themselves. And the young gentleman as has the pamphlet papers, he comes round regular like, and civil too, and says as how folks have a vote in London, and a vote in Cayle, and another in the country, and a shocking shame when poor folk have never no more than one vote apiece, says he. Them shooting down the Boers, too, says he, as only fight for liberty; you'd laugh to hear him at his talk. And Parliament as lasts for seven years, says he, with the lords as sit hereditary like. But never no help for Williams and me when times is bad, with his pamphlets and all. Nor no soup, Mrs. Willoughby, ma'am.'

Willoughby could be held in check no longer.

'I hope you listen to none of these wretches, Mrs. Williams. It's disgraceful!'

'I suppose Williams is a Conservative, and not a Liberal?' Mrs. Willoughby ventured to say.

'Conservative and Liberal!' Mrs. Williams exclaimed, refolding her hands left upon right. 'Bless me! is there to be an election?'

This acute observation was suggested rather by the bare observation of the party names than by the growing graciousness of Willoughby's expansive smile.

'One never knows,' said Mrs. Willoughby.

'One boasts the name of one's party, election or no election,' said her son.

If Mrs. Williams remembered right, her husband was a Liberal; but, as she said, his voting days were past.

'Oh, you must cheer up,' said Mrs. Willoughby. 'We must make him a good Conservative before election time. He shall go to the poll in our carriage.'

The champion of Conservatism, with his back to the fire, recognised the occasion for sowing the good seed in the soil of the ignorant poor. It was a conflict, he knew, between the great ideals and the flattery of Brandon, his rival. He began with an air of explanatory graciousness. Surely sensible people like Mrs. Williams were not deceived by this nonsense about the House of Lords and plural

voting. Votes given to the Liberals were votes given to the Liberal leaders, who were no statesmen, and not even, he feared, good men. There was, moreover, the Empire, the memory of the war, the historic Church, the navy, and the army. On all these subjects he expatiated dully.

'If people like your husband, Mrs. Williams, do not use their votes aright, you will live to see the flag of England dragged in the mire.'

But never so much as a shudder appeared on the surface of Mrs. Williams.

'To be sure,' she said, not incredulous, but merely without interest.

'Ah, politics is a fine thing,' said old Mrs. Hedge, her mother.

'To those who think aright,' said Willoughby in keen debating style.

'Lord Charles Brandon, he says, "Politics, Mrs. Williams," says he——'

'Lord Charles Brandon is neither here nor there,' said Willoughby, enraged by the opposition of an absent rival.

'They mostly votes as Lord Charles bids them in these parts, I've heard tell,' Mrs. Hedge remarked, nodding her white head impressively. 'Twas so at the last election, and even times that was before then, when Matilda here was a-sleeping in her cradle, and Lord Charles, he was about on his pony of a night in these streets saying, "Vote for Liberals and free drink!" bless his little heart!'

She laughed a croaky laugh, while Willoughby flushed scarlet and thought of hell-fire.

'Is that so?' he cried. 'A boy of fifteen!'

For he had not heard of this among the chequered experiences of Brandon in the election of '95. It was satisfactory, at any rate, to remember that the subterfuge which released him from school on that occasion had been discovered, with salutary consequences.

'The poor folks' friend, he is,' continued Mrs. Hedge, 'and long before Matilda here was born, when Annie was his nurse up at the castle, he comes along in these parts with Annie, no bigger than yon table, a-talking and a-playing with the children in the streets, and fighting with

the boys, and back at nights to gold plates and warming-pans, and all, up at his lordship's castle, and bringing ponies for our Bob, calling him Dusky for a new name—ay, and sometimes a-leaning against my knee as quiet as a little angel.'

What warnings and exhortations were brewing in the heart of Willoughby, what homilies about the wiles of Satan and the deceitfulness of flattery, what veracious accounts of Brandon's parlous moral state, were never heard, unless, perhaps, by Mrs. Willoughby on the way home. For there happened a thing that was, after all, as natural as it was unfortunate: Brandon himself came into the house.

He performed a casual salutation of Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Hedge. With Mrs. Willoughby he shook hands, showing the utmost courtesy possible in one who appears to be thinking about anything but the person he is greeting. He smiled at Willoughby.

'Poaching, Henry!' he said in tones of good-humoured banter. Then he went and sat on the sofa by the door, and took up the parish magazine to read. He crossed his legs, leant back, and looked utterly at home; nor could any conceivable conduct on his part have brought the Willoughbys a more intense embarrassment. Against all reason and sense, they felt themselves to be in the position of trespassers. Brandon really might, thought Mrs. Willoughby, have joined in the talk and inquired for the health of those at Mowis Court, as Henry would have done. But no; he sat apart, a critic doubtless, and left them the labour of the day.

Mrs. Williams made a most unhappy observation.

'Liberals or Conservatives, Mrs. Willoughby, ma'am, it's not but what Williams and me is grateful for your kindness, to be sure.'

Brandon did not appear to hear what was said.

'Never mind politics, Mrs. Williams,' said the district visitor. 'I never think anyone less good for differing from me in politics.'

'To be sure, Mr. Henry, he speaks fine, ma'am, and right welcome to argue and talk—Mr. Henry or another.'

For Brandon's presence made the woman feel herself mistress in her own house, and fit for the rôle of hostess.

'I shall not forget the soup,' said Mrs. Willoughby, accepting defeat. She rose to depart, and perhaps the door closed on them a moment sooner than perfect deference demanded.

Immediately the scene became homelike and comfortable. Mrs. Hedge picked up her knitting, Mrs. Williams her sock; Matilda climbed back to the window-sill, and Brandon came to the fireplace and flung himself heavily in the armchair.

'Let us have some tea, grandmother,' he said. 'You make it—make it as it ought to be made.'

The Willoughbys were not mentioned, for when Brandon came to Mercy Lane it was as if he stepped wholly from one life to the other, and he would not ever speak of the people he met at his father's house. The family was accustomed to his ways.

'You're tired, my dearie,' said Mrs. Hedge, as she put the kettle on the fire.

'I've been for a long walk,' said Brandon. 'When you're as young as me, grandmother, you'll know what it means to be tired.'

The old woman chuckled delightedly.

'I shan't ever be as young as you again,' she said.

'You old people are always just half tired—not quite tired and not quite untired,' he said. 'Were you ever like me, always either dead beat or terribly brisk? Were you like that when you were young?'

That question did the trick. Mrs. Hedge began to drone onwards and onwards about the days of her youth, making monotonous music, dreamy and soothing, like one who reads the Bible to the sick. Brandon lay back in his chair, with his head sunk forwards on his chest, and let the soporific sound suffuse his consciousness. It brought him rest and warmth. When he had drunk a cup of tea, he pulled himself together.

'I've come to talk business, and I've got to do it quickly,' he said. 'You know about the new theatre. Well, it's nearly all settled now. I shall get the building

before long. I want a man to be door-keeper and a woman to clean the place in the mornings—Williams and you, you see. We'll soon have Williams well enough. Thirty shillings a week between you.'

Mrs. Williams was utterly certain that such a thing was impossible—physically, morally, and socially.

'It would never be respectable at a theatre and all that.'

'Who is respectable?' replied Brandon, with all his magnificent indifference to the intelligibility of his arguments. 'I'm not respectable; you're not respectable; nobody's respectable; nobody wants to be respectable.'

They did not understand him any more than they had understood Willoughby, but they recognised that he was talking as a man talks to his equals.

He argued and expostulated.

'Oh, I shall be swearing at you in a minute. Now promise! Thirty shillings a week. Grandmother thinks you a fool: I can see that. It's the best bit of business you ever struck.'

Of course, he had his way, and the whole family of Williams was given up to rejoicing. Once again their friend had been a saviour. His phrases and arguments were handed about in Mercy Lane, curiously garbled, like the words of a great philosopher. 'Nobody's respectable; nobody wants to be respectable.' Those words at least were reported in their true form, pleasing all and enlightening none. They had a fine Brandonian flavour, which sufficed.

And Brandon went back to Vitryfield a man refreshed. For a whole hour he had been among friends.

## CHAPTER IV

ARBITRARILY and for convenience we mark time by means of certain astronomic occurrences, but there is in every society a chronology of its own which has a closer bearing on the course of facts. The events of this history begin in the early spring of the year 1903. To the politician and to the oddly prejudiced mind of the dreamer of Vitryfield it was just after the time when the might of the British Empire was marshalled by far-seeing statesmanship to give a pledge of subservience to a great Teutonic chief by collecting his Venezuelan debts. Similarly, to the practical inhabitant of Cayle there was a transition of epochs. It was the time when the centre of sensational gravity had fairly shifted from the Richardson divorce case to the wild proposal of Lord Charles Brandon for starting a cheap theatre. Even the King's Proctor cannot make the interest of a divorce eternal, and Cayle was more than a little tired of lying under the shadow of a predominant topic whose very nature forbade outspoken treatment. The popular theatre came as a relief to every drawing-room. To expose its lurking wickedness was a considerable feat of moral agility; it was far more stimulating than the hurling of imprecations which could be justified in five words by a reference to the Seventh Commandment. That levelled great and small socialistically: the Willoughbys spoke with no greater authority than the riffraff. But the moral aspect of the people's theatre was a trickier theme. How proud, then, were those who knew that they could shatter this predominant topic in an instant! Let them but mention Sir Benjamin Mason's retirement, and they would raise such a Babel as would engulf the old topic in one day,

together with all remnants of the Richardson divorce, and even the approaching rumblings of the hospital bazaar. But this was a case where pledges of secrecy worked to defer publication, not to hasten it, and it was not until the day of Mrs. Russell's 'at home' at the end of March that the people's theatre, as a target of tongues, was superseded.

The Marquis of Wight was under no obligation to attend this or any other 'at home'—it was a privilege he valued more than even his lordly exemption from serving on juries—but he was pressing in his desire that his son and daughter should not fail to honour Mrs. Russell's festival. At luncheon, after finishing his predigested biscuits and his liberal allowance of brandy, he put his finger-tips together and pointed out how a candidate for Parliamentary honours must lay himself out to please the middle as well as the lower classes. It happened that the Vitryfield party were alone, a family trio, a conjuncture which commonly drove Brandon from the polished glory of the Adam dining-room to have his meals among the grooms in the stables. The allusion to his possible candidature had its ordinary effect upon him, intensifying surliness. As for Mrs. Russell's 'at home,' he was tired of middle-class Tories, he said. And very proper of him, thought Lord Wight, adding, however, that even among one's social and intellectual inferiors the performance of social duties is the mark of a gentleman. Where were they now? Was it a candidate weighing expediency, or a gentleman taking up the cross of social obligation? Brandon had long ceased to argue with his father, or attempt to sift and unravel his assertions. He tossed off a glass of claret, and let it be understood that Mrs. Russell's 'at home' could go to the devil.

The father of Brandon was in several ways a person of importance. He represented, in the first place, the splendour of Vitryfield and the glory of its stables; in the second place, the convenience of a house in Belgrave Square; thirdly, an allowance of £600 a year to each of his younger children; and, lastly, an inclination to pay the debts of his son rather than incur the displeasure of

his daughter. At this point his importance ends. Liberal peers do not grow by every roadside, yet no Government had ever called upon Lord Wight for ministerial assistance. He had in his long reign turned his hereditary Whiggism into modern Liberalism, been personally conducted by the disciples of Mill to the intellectual Furthest North, and acquired a certain habit of meagre rhetoric that made it quite decent to print his name on bills and posters as chairman at Liberal meetings. But his actual importance was confined to the points mentioned above. Many a time had Brandon, at the end of a meal, during which he had blushed for the defects of the living parent, taken the arm of a favoured guest, and led him to the portrait of the parent who died at his birth. It hung in the dining-room, among many Brandons of the past, next to the hot-blooded grandfather who had left this world of wine and women as soon as ever the present Marquis could have wished. Such a gay and daring message flashed from below the dark lashes in that picture, such raillery was ready to leap from those small lips, such passion lurked behind. 'If she had lived,' Brandon would say, 'she would have been a friend, don't you think, not an enemy?' It was implied that the other parent was the enemy. But a tyrant in these days he was not. When Brandon refused to go to Mrs. Russell's 'at home' there was no pressure used, no allusion to the economic link of £600 a year, which was the only link the Marquis saw between himself and his younger son. Liberty is the thing, even in a family, as soon as school-days end.

The tyranny was Alice's. She frowned on Brandon's refusal. He must go with her to Mrs. Russell's, she insisted, for the Dean would expect it. Was the Dean to be left in the lurch? There flashed on Brandon's mind a recollection of what he knew about the internal politics of the Deanery. The Dean gave £50 to the people's theatre, and was therefore in hot water with his family. If, indeed, he would be gratified by Brandon's presence, then for Brandon there was nothing but to curse and inquire what clothes he must wear. This sur-

render and its cause displayed a fixed characteristic of him and his associates.

It is to be hoped the Dean understood the nature of the sacrifice, for certainly no one else did.

'Why, here's Lord Charles with his sister,' said one in the crowded low-roofed drawing-room at the Deanery. 'What can have brought him here? Look, Mrs. Russell doesn't seem too pleased to see him, does she? What a greeting!'

'Not more than he deserves,' replied the kindred spirit. 'I suppose he has come to collect money for his theatre.'

They saw him make his way to Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet on the window-seat.

'To watch that woman you might think she was his mother. She has so very little discrimination.' Or was it that the late Mayor's widow would be genial even to a Papist or a heathen if he had a handle to his name? She was worldly.

Very worldly, it must be confessed, was her advice to Brandon that afternoon. The room was full. The choicest that Cayle could give was Mrs. Russell's always on the two great days that marked the Deanery year. In July they would swarm on her lawn, and listen to a military band; in March they packed her drawing-room, hall, and dining-room. In July they would say, 'Were you at Mrs. Russell's garden-party?' In March they said, 'Were you at Mrs. Russell's?' They were the subject of much comment from the widow and the young man in the window. Of course no open avowal came from Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's practised lips. She did not, like the Marquis, openly prescribe the course for a possible Parliamentary candidate, and she really had no need to do so. The unspoken words were written large as life in every compression of her firm lips, every jerk of her lorgnettes, every meaning variation of the angle of her eyebrows, as she urged him to go and make himself agreeable to the guests of Mrs. Russell. Who knew how soon he might want their help, or their goodwill at the least? There were some Liberals present, too—So-and-so and So-and-so. Would not Charley take them cups

of tea, and talk small talk for so short a time? But the more angry and insistent she became the less inclined was he to leave her: she was a friend, and she amused him.

It amused him, too, to say outrageous things to her, things which pleased her in proportion as they shocked her. How could he be exclusive, she asked, when he was the friend of artisans and costermongers? So he gave her his opinion of the social classes.

'You miss the point,' he said. 'I like the upper classes, and I like the lower classes, because both are simple and savage and honest. The middle classes are odious, because they are smug and canting and initiative. It is cant that separates the classes, not wealth. Take the aristocracy: the best of them are men of honesty and good sense; the others are honest fools and honest scoundrels. The canting aristocrat scarcely exists. The same thing applies to the lower classes. But between the two it is all cant—cant moral, cant intellectual, cant genteel. That's the middle classes; that's what is in this room.'

In such manner he expressed himself at the beginning of the entertainment, serenely and luxuriously. He was contented, for a friend was with him to protect him, and he came straight from his stables and his books. The stripes of Cayle society were healed on his body, because he had for weeks removed himself to the peace of seclusion. He could even smile as he pointed out the people who were obviously talking about him, and described the welcome his hostess had given him.

Then came another friend. It was Mr. Worthing, the prosperous solicitor who was the manager of the Brandon family affairs, and the chief of the Liberal Association in Cayle. It was not for one so loyal as he to look askance at any son of Vitryfield. For the first time in her life Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, of the Primrose League, was in a Liberal conclave.

The good man bent over them in agitation.

'It's out; it's all over the room—the whole business,' he whispered. 'Heaven knows who set it going. So do be most careful what you say.'

For a moment there was a sudden stiffening, a look on Brandon's face as if he had heard that someone wished to fight him. He looked round the room. Then the lighter manner returned, and he explained to Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet that the news of Sir Benjamin Mason's retirement had got abroad. She expressed a seemly horror.

'And they've got hold of my father's pet scheme for putting me up as candidate. That's it, isn't it, Mr. Worthing?' It was only too true. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet fixed a firm grip on Brandon's arm. She was so glad, she said; she was delighted. She had half expected it; she had always been sure he was going to be great, Conservative though she was. Let him go at once into the crowd and play his part, as Alice was already playing hers.

And now the people of Cayle were going to do a memorable thing. Actions there are which one man will never do alone unless he happens to be drunk, which are lightly done by an assembly of people before ever a single individual has exercised his volition in the matter. The English law of conspiracy has this psychological basis. What may be harmless in an individual is criminal in a crowd. Men and women of the *élite* of Cayle, seventy-five or more, saw Brandon in Mrs. Russell's drawing-room, and heard the circulating joke about his standing for Parliament. It was too much. Off went their tongues, round went their eyes—mirth, wit, scorn, delight, all flashing like sunlight on the waters over the common soul of Cayle. Manager of a provincial theatre and member for the borough! Stable-boy and legislator! The impenitent eyesore of the town who now asked the town to give him its greatest prize! Of course, there was not one of them who would verbally insult him to his face; but if he saw their eyes upon him, if he heard titters, and saw faces hurriedly composed as he turned to stare, then let him. He came here to curry favour, he who had not been to a social gathering for months. Let him see the return they could make. It was justice.

But such a mood is dangerous in a crowd. There were

young men present, too, who had sisters and mothers, and were very ready to be the executive expression of the general opinion. It would be no small thing to have struck a blow in a cause that was sure to be the governing topic for weeks and weeks. Such, unfortunately, was the atmosphere when Brandon left his two friends, and went out to offer Cayle the olive-branch. Now, if ever, he thought, they might show their disposition, and he would watch them. They had seen him in a new light, and either they should cry peace or give him a good case against them. Perhaps the former alternative was one which he had little fear of their adopting.

But he gave them their chance. He spoke to Charlotte St. Agnes, the sister of a friend, and she was gracious and softly congratulatory; then it was Mrs. Worthing, friendly, but frightened to be with him. And then he saw what he had come to see. All eyes were on him. To hear the words they spoke was as unnecessary as to hear the words of the Hallelujah Chorus; the music alone is sufficient to identify the emotions it expresses. He saw that he was in a den of lions.

Can a thing be foreseen with something like pleasure and realized, the same thing, with fierce anger? After all, anger itself is sometimes pleasant to anticipate. Brandon smelt war, and the breath of war went into his blood. He was ready for it. Mr. Upworth came to talk to him, while all around them stopped to listen. It was the people's theatre again. The champion of Cayle said he approved of amusing the people, but there was a right and a wrong way of doing everything. Was there, indeed? Brandon, pleasantly conversational, perfectly reckless, caught sight of old Richardson across the room, the man who took his wife to the Divorce Court. 'What is the right way of committing adultery, for instance?' he asked. The listeners had no need of further witness. They heard it with their own ears, a flagrant repetition of the old crime of the schoolboy and the University man, a flippant sneer at the wisdom of his elders and betters. They heard it barbed with indecency, too, here in Mrs. Russell's drawing-room. If they had stooped to an

organized demonstration of hostility, they had their justification in that remark.

For a moment Mrs. Russell stood alone. Brandon was at her side. He would let these people have their fling ; their score should mount as high as they chose.

'I am glad to hear Bobby's coming back from South Africa,' he said as kindly as a mother could desire. Everyone around was listening and watching almost without disguise. Mrs. Russell in the instant remembered that she was a hostess and a leader of Cayle society. She thought of the late outrageous speech to Mr. Upworth ; the madness of the riot carried her away. Vaguely, wearily, insultingly, she answered, 'Are you ?' And there was an audible smile from all the people near.

That was enough for Brandon, who did not wholly realize that he was present at a scene which was unique, which could hardly occur again, which all would be ashamed of to-morrow. He had got his good case now, and he looked round the room for Alice. She was with Charlotte St. Agnes near the door, and there he joined her.

'I want to go,' he said.

She answered that she was ready as unconcernedly as if nothing had occurred. In the hall the Dean pursued and caught them. There passed from him to them a heart-whole apology, without words or gestures, as is the way with people like the Dean. He had some suggestion about the people's theatre, which made a sufficient vehicle for all that he wished to convey.

'These people are playing with fire,' he said to Miss St. Agnes a moment later.

'It has been a disgraceful scene ! Poor Charley has done a great deal of good in Cayle,' said the girl. 'If this kind of thing continues I shall not be surprised to see him leave us altogether, and give us up as a bad job.'

But the Dean stroked his chin, and repeated :

'They are playing with fire.'

It would be told at every dinner-table in Cayle that night. They were talking it over—one great buzz all through the drawing-room.

'There!' said the Dean to Miss St. Agnes, 'look at your brother. He has just come, and they are telling him. Do you often see him look as cross as that? Look at Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet talking to my wife. Do you often see her quite like that to her greatest friend?'

'We have given him a lesson he won't forget,' Mrs. Russell was saying.

Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet had a license for emphatic expression. She tossed her head. 'It seems he is so bad that he can't come into your drawing-room without making your guests behave like fishwives. He must be infectious.' And she made her way through the room, scolding and rebuking, so that nothing but her licensed tongue could have saved her from being cast out of paradise by the angels of Cayle society. The Dean was right. To hit Brandon was to hit one who directly or indirectly could hit back.

With what weapons, then, would he be avenged? Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet had spoken strongly; Rupert St. Agnes, of all men most good-natured, was cross. And he himself, with Alice, drove back to Vitryfield in moody silence. Would Alice hit back? She too was silent, and she was also considerably alarmed. The Dean's comment came to her mind independent of its author, and she told herself that Cayle was playing with fire. The Dean could not know that as well as she; his fingers would not be so near that fire as hers.

'You gave no provocation, Charley! Surely you gave no provocation!'

'It didn't seem to me that any provocation was necessary,' he answered too lightly to please her. There were three young artisans who passed them in the road who saluted grandly, and were warmed by Brandon's cheery smile. An old woman, as usual, called out, 'God bless your lordship!' The greengrocer, whose shop was the old toll-house at the bridge, came hurrying out to call his greeting as they passed. To Alice there was terror in these things, a terror pointed by contrast. What if these good people had been in Mrs. Russell's drawing-room? She felt that it was a line of safety, a lesser evil, that she took when she said to Brandon:

'After this there isn't any question about your standing. You mustn't answer them till you can do so as their member.' A Parliamentary contest at least insured safety from the greater dangers that she feared.

But he gave her no proper answer. Only some minutes later he said :

'I've found a building to have the theatre in at last. The old corn-market is to be let. I'm going to the Mayor to get hold of it. It'll be a good thing to have that settled.'

At any rate, Miss St. Agnes was wrong in thinking that he would abandon Cayle.

## CHAPTER V

THE Liberal Club was the most notorious drinking-shop in Cayle. Liberal though it was, it had to endure the hostility of the Bishop and a number of other prominent politicians of local fame. The loss of its license was averted from year to year by nothing except the efforts of a few influential persons such as Dr. Potts, a somewhat erastian Liberal, who looked upon it as a co-operative institution for the sale of votes, and suggested to the Bishop that Providence uses strange methods to attain its ends. What really saved the club was the series of indignant articles launched by the Conservative *Advertiser* against this hotbed of Liberalism. That removed the question from the stage of morality to the arena of party politics, with the result that Liberals rallied round Dr. Potts in supporting the club. Curiously enough, when Brandon started the idea of running a cheap theatre for the working people nearly all the main opponents of the club became opponents of the theatre too, and so worked against the only practicable means of effecting their virtuous purpose. This annoyed him, as did the fact that the subscriptions for the theatre came mainly from his Conservative enemies.

The club contained a billiard-room of good size, two smaller rooms used by the more exclusive of its members, a drinking-saloon, and a large hall that served for concerts and political meetings, and many other forms of riotous amusement. The secretary had an office upstairs, where he kept the party books, and had conferences with the Liberal agent, when such a person existed. The secretary was a fair young man, who wore knickerbockers and nice stockings, and was much annoyed if the charwoman were

taken for his wife. The club had an excellent financial position. Its sale of drink was very large indeed, and the drink was good in quality. The rooms were adorned with many pictures of men of Liberal light and Radical leading, but as a matter of practice the political test was not very rigidly applied.

There were nights when attendance at the club fell low, but sometimes, for no particular reason, and without organization, members came in such great numbers that the rooms were filled to discomfort. They came from every part of the town, old men and boys, in sickness and in health, from scolding wives, from families starved for want of the money spent in drink, from every species of home, in old streets and in new, happy and dismal, prosperous and poor. They came to talk and drink, to feel the comfort of human society, and to receive the cheery influence of blazing light and rollicking sound. They came in democratic mood, for it was a fine tradition of the club to disregard the many ranks and grades which exist in the classes too loosely labelled poor, and most men were ready to be boon companions of all others. Mr. Walker, the secretary, would send round to the inn in the next street and borrow a serving-man or two to ease the burden of his staff; so it was grandly simple to have your glass filled or your liquors mixed as you stood in the various rooms, for waiters went walking round carrying trays of drinks and rank cigars and tobacco. Talk and laughter ceased not in any of the rooms, with banter here and quarrelling there, and occasionally a group of serious persons busy with politics or talk of trade. Nor was anyone less happy for the presence of the earlier victims of drink whose bodies lay on chairs or floors, an inconvenience too common to surprise, too obviously necessary to cause resentment except in those who stumbled on them as they lay. In one place was a group of gamblers tossing for halfpence. In another some man made play with his idiotic skill in balancing on a chair or catching coppers in his mouth, watched by a party of those whose social arts so poorly served them that they welcomed any spectacle to make them appear at ease.

There were the sober men, too, in abundance, who came to talk and enjoy the excitement. And there were all the various tribes of the children of Bacchus—the noisy and the dull, the maudlin and the tiresome, with a few of those remorseful drunkards in whom wine goes to the conscience after it has filled the head; while all the time the music of coarse voices and coarser language stirred the dusty air.

Such a night it was, and the meeting-room was packed with people. The noise, the talk, the heavy atmosphere, all was there, and the evening was still young. No sort of entertainment was in progress, but there were the extra serving-men with drink and tobacco, the stream that went backwards and forwards between the meeting-room and the bar, the people who were soberly contented, and the others who were contentedly drunk. The old men were telling their tales, the young men played games or stood as spectators, and here and there were the groups of recognised companions, whose privacy it was insulting to assail. There was a ring of people in the middle of the hall, where laughter was continuous, rising sometimes to deafening intensity when the scene gave some piquant instigation to mirth. The game was cock-fighting. The great moment was when the unsuccessful fighter rolled over on the gritty linoleum, amid the yells of the appreciative multitude around him. Then came the demands of those who had put their money on the winner. Both fighters called for drink. The finely generous paid out money that the bankrupt might not go dry, and a Babel of names, nicknames, encouragement, excuses, challenges, cheers, jeers, attended the choosing of new fighters.

Leaning against the wall at the end of the hall, alone, thoughtful, still, was Brandon. When Liberal gentlemen were sent by duty to play a game of billiards at the club, they came in sorrow and departed in joy; but Brandon came because he liked it. For the Liberal gentlemen the club put on its Sunday best, but not for Brandon. Had he joined the cock-fighting group, he would but have made one onlooker the more. The cock-fighting would

have continued, and the laughter. In like manner it was open to him to lean against the wall in solitary enjoyment. He came among the members of the club, not as a visitor, but as one of themselves, in heart and soul and sympathy, simple as a peasant, happy as a child.

As he leant against the wall, his eyes were set vaguely on the cock-fighting group, and he listened while its discordant melody held on. Most things, good and bad, were represented in his nature, and at this moment he was a poet. Ungathered poetry trembled in his eyes and about his lips. His physical state was what it would be hard to call drunk and an injustice to describe as sober. Details in his dress were admirably characteristic. His cap, for instance, was pulled low down over his forehead—who shall say if this was art or accident?—and it was crooked, looking rather rakish. He wore gray flannel trousers and heavy shooting-boots. There was a button missing from his coat.

He was approached by a handsome dark boy of twenty, the rising hope of the motor trade in Cayle, who saluted in military fashion.

'I've collected the committee in Walker's room,' said he, 'and they're waiting for you, m'lord.'

'What committee?' asked Brandon, not yet awake.

'The People's Theatre Committee,' said his lieutenant.

Brandon's awakening was heralded, as usual, by his searching in his pocket for a pipe.

'Right you are, Dusky,' he said. 'I'll come.'

He was filling his pipe, still looking at the cock-fighting group. But he hesitated, as he more and more returned to the realities of life. Then he put the pipe back into his pocket, and a mountainous wave of fury broke over his mind. He had remembered what cause had brought him to the club.

'Look at those people,' he said, pointing to the group. 'I could send a legion of devils into them which would drive them like the swine down a steep place into the sea! By God, Dusky! I'll make this place hum to-night! You'll see something to-night. Now, look here: get hold of Morgan and Butts, and drive up every man here

to Walker's room until it is chock full. Tell them I've got some news about the theatre. Go on !'

The mender of motor-cars went off in proud obedience to do the bidding of the best of lords. Brandon, hardening into action, strode down the hall. He went upstairs and through the billiard-room to the secretary's office, which had been put at the disposal of the Theatre Committee. It was a good-sized room, with little furniture except a long table covered with green baize, some chairs, and a writing-desk in the corner by the window. Some twenty men of various ages and ranks were sitting round the table. They cheered as Brandon entered the room. But he made no gracious response. He walked to the vacant place at the head of the table, and stood there, in cold passion, silent and dangerous. They pushed a whisky-bottle towards him. He mixed himself a drink and gulped it down as he stood.

Then a crowd of men began to come into the room. Some of the committee objected to the invasion, and appealed to Brandon, but he took no notice of them. He stood unmoved, with his knuckles resting on the table, while the stream of puzzled expectant men poured into the room. They filled every corner, some sober and some drunk, and the hindmost packed themselves outside around the open door. At last came Dusky Williams and young Morgan, pushing through the crowd to the side of Brandon to await his orders.

No one present knew the cause of this strange assembling. Previous meetings of Brandon's committee had been held in private, their doings not coming to publicity except by way of conversation afterwards. They had roused unusual interest, not only in the club, but throughout the working-class centres of the town, and in every house that held people who cared to be amused. The proposal was much talked about. It reacted favourably on Brandon's popularity, and Brandon's popularity reacted on his proposal. It was a source of interest to women as well as men. What was common knowledge was that the completion of the scheme was near, and when Brandon filled the com-

mittee-room with the rank and file of the club, their natural expectation would have been to hear that the work was crowned with success. But where was that belief, with the leader looking as he did? These men were not excessively acute, but their eyes were quick enough to tell them that his appearance boded no good. Seeing him stand motionless, with lips compressed and cold menace in his eyes, his audience caught the temper of his spirit before his first word was spoken. He stretched their dull nerves even in his silence, and they were prepared for something terrible. They felt, but did not understand.

At last he spoke, softly and low, without emotion in his voice.

The Theatre Committee had no secrets, he said. There was no reason why their deliberations should not be heard by every member of the club. That was why he had invited them. He had some news about the theatre.

In heavy, monotonous tones he told them of the progress of his plans, of the past discussions of the committee, the engagement of a manager, the selection of a building. He explained that the old corn-market was to be let, the property of the Mayor and Corporation. This was the only building which would suit their purposes. There was money, he said, enough for their immediate needs. He would publish a list of the subscriptions. Generous sympathy and unstinted supplies of money had come from a small number of men and women, both Liberals and Tories, but for whose wealth the theatre scheme could never have survived its birth. Those men and women had wealth, with its cares and snares, and perhaps they had many troubles and regrets. But they would never regret the day when they gave their money for the happiness of the people. Their names would be put up in the hall of the club—the names of those who would live to learn that, though the people might forgive its enemies, it did not forget its friends.

So much said Brandon, hardly lifting his eyes from the green baize table, speaking thickly and monotonously. His hearers murmured applause. But for his deadly

manner they would have cheered openly, for his words stirred their interest and warmed their hearts. They could not understand him.

Then, with some brightening of his tone, he described a few of the details of the scheme. He told them about the arrangements proposed for seating the audience, the bar where food and drink would be provided, the construction of the stage, the price of tickets. They heard some forecast of the theatre's financial prospects. As he grew more cheerful, they, too, became more keenly pleased and interested. He spoke of the plays they would produce. Every other week the theatre would be open, six days in a week, if they could afford it. There would be love plays, murder plays, comic plays, musical plays, and a pantomime at Christmas. Admission would be for sixpence to any part of the hall. No seats would be reserved.

The speaker at last seemed relieved of his oppression. He spoke fluently, with cheerful interest in the subject, making easy gestures. He let his glance wander about among his attentive audience.

'Well,' he said, 'that is what we arranged, the committee and I. I hope you all approve of it.'

The ensuing pause was filled with cheering, and Brandon mixed himself another drink.

'And so to-day I went with my solicitor to see the Mayor, to get a lease of the old corn-market.'

Was that the news of the day? they thought. A few men cheered. But the speaker's art was the art of teasing; for just when all seemed happiest and best, he dropped back into his melancholy and sank his eyes to the table. It was as if the plum were to be snatched out of their very mouths. It was like a troubled waking from dreams of pleasure. They returned to excitement and uneasiness.

'The Mayor was in,' said Brandon. 'I told him I had come to take the old corn-market, which was to be the people's theatre. The Mayor is Mr. Hitchens. He is a grocer. He is rich. I don't know if he is a good master. This very night he is at a great dinner in the

Town Hall. If he wants to see a play, he goes to the Royal, or to London. He pays his half-guinea, and he sits in a velvet seat. He is like us—he is fond of a theatre. He enjoys the music and the jokes, and the acting, as we do. He knows what it is when a cheerful evening follows on a hard day's work. He likes to give his wife a treat. And it is that man,' said Brandon, still in tones sepulchral, but raising his eyes to gather the emotions of his hearers — 'it is that man of fur robes and riches, of good dinners and strong wines, that grasping grocer, that slave-driver, who says "No!"'

As, with a thumping blow he struck his hand upon the table, he threw up his head, opened his voice, and turned loose his passion in his face. "'No! I have the Corporation with me, and I speak for them, and I say that I will cut off this right hand before I let the people have their theatre.'"

He paused. Here and there a man exclaimed in astonished anger, but for the most part there was hesitation and a lack of understanding. To some extent the speaker's explosion of personality deadened the meaning of his words.

'Do you understand?' he said. 'Do you see what I have got for my pains? After the time and trouble I have spent, after my efforts in collecting money, after all my thought and discussion, the letters I have written, the interviews I have had, the meetings of this committee—do you see what has been my reward? This is what I get out of it. I go to the Mayor, the chosen representative of Cayle, and in five minutes he has made my whole work fruitless, and crushed my plans to dust. "No," he says, "I'll put a spoke in your wheel. Your friends the people, they are swine, loafers, rioters; they must not be allowed to have their theatre." So I argue with the Mayor, and plead for the theatre I had worked to obtain. And the Mayor, he blows out his stomach and pulls a long face. "Theatres are a temptation," he says. "They are wicked. They will lead the people into vice. The people cannot be trusted; they are so weak and low-minded. It would be immoral to

let them have actors among them." Well, do you think I liked it ?

Now they began to understand his meaning. Angry murmurs, groans, hoots, curses, sounded from every corner of the room. It was like an engine struggling into motion with spluttering and slow movements that foretell the power it is gathering. But the artist speaker still kept attention centred on his own woes.

'Have I deserved that ?' he cried passionately. 'I have tried to do something for the people, and my reward is to have my friends insulted, my work destroyed, my plans called wicked, my theatre forbidden ! How would you like it, if you were me ? How would you like to be lectured like naughty boys ? Had I been a little younger, he'd have had me whipped. Would you like to be treated like that ? Do you wonder at my being angry ? Are you fond of hearing your friends abused, spoken of as a herd of swine ?'

Groans now at every pause interrupted the speech. They had caught his meaning, his spirit, his anger, and were ready for the change of key which he introduced.

'How do you like it yourselves ?' he said more quietly, leading a note of sarcasm into his tones. 'There will be no theatre now. If you ever think about it some evening in the future, and feel that you would like to have a theatre to go to, you will know that there is no theatre, because the Mayor can pay for his seat at the Royal. There will be no night's pleasure for sixpence, because the Mayor says it is dangerous for you to be amused ; no music and jokes, because the Mayor says you are so easily led into vice ; no actors and actresses, because the Mayor can't trust you ; no songs, because the Mayor is so respectable ; no bright lights and tobacco and drinks, because the Mayor says pleasure will turn you into beasts.'

He could not pass a comma without waiting till a burst of rage was checked. The circuit was complete, and the electricity of passion bounded round the room the instant Brandon pressed the button. It was the same with old and young, and drunk and sober.

'Dr. Russell, the Dean, has given you £50 for your

theatre, but the Mayor is too righteous to allow it. Mr. Rupert St. Agnes, a gentleman from Eton and Oxford, a Tory, has given £100, but the grocer Mayor is too fastidious to allow it. Go home to your children, and tell them they must not spin their tops without the Mayor's permission. Go to your wives, and tell them that the Mayor can't trust you' (groans) 'to behave like human beings' (loud and fiercer shouts), 'unless you are locked up like criminals in your houses. I say the Mayor is a slanderous hypocrite, an enemy of the working man.'

Something inaudible, too, drowned in the seething tumult of rage.

'A cheating grocer, who uses the wealth he has got from the plunder of the poor . . .'

' . . . to fill his bloated stomach with good things . . .'

And finally, after interruption, a peroration of seven words :

' . . . and forbid the pleasures of the people.'

A bald-headed, dark-bearded member of the committee, one of the few men present who were shocked at the inflammatory language, rose and begged for a hearing. He suggested that a deputation should be sent to petition the Mayor, having in mind a black-coated Sunday reception at the Town Hall, with courteous language on both sides.

'But the Mayor has a big dinner going on,' said Brandon. 'Do you mean to send a deputation to see the Mayor at his dinner? What do you say, gentlemen? Shall we do as Mr. Clarke suggests, and go and tell the Mayor what we think of him? Shall we tackle the Mayor's dinner-party?'

It was useless for Mr. Clarke to attempt any explanation of his words. He had meant something very different; but the maddened men accepted Brandon's interpretation, and there was a general movement towards the door, with shouts and cursing. The men of the committee got up from their chairs. All discipline was at an end. Cries of 'The Town Hall!' spread downstairs and through the building even faster than the

infuriated mass of rioters who fought their way to the ground-floor and the street. The news, as is the way of news, was over the whole club in an instant. No one paused to find a coat or hat, and they hurried, as if time were important.

Brandon, Morgan, and Dusky Williams were the only men who stood still in the secretary's room. Brandon found time to swallow the drink he had mixed in the middle of his speech. He was thinking. He seized the collar of Dusky, and shouted in his ear.

'We can't go straight to the Town Hall,' he said. 'We're not enough. We must go round by Mercy Lane and New Street, and collect a crowd. We'll go down the private staircase, and meet these fellows in the street.'

Dusky nodded. Brandon took hold of Morgan's arm, and the three men left the club hurriedly by the secretary's private staircase which led from the room to the street.

It throws ironic light on the quality of popular judgment that these doings were ever after considered to be an electioneering artifice of devilish ingenuity. In truth, they were the outcome of a good dinner at a good hotel and a superfluity of whiskies-and-sodas following in its wake; or, put at their highest, they were the uncalculated gambols of a wayward genius that finds Destiny while frolicking with Chance.

## CHAPTER VI

'It is occasions like this that make Cayle what it is,' said the Bishop to Lady Alice, as they sat together in the reception-room, with the father of Willoughby standing behind them. The occasion was that of a farewell banquet to do honour to the retiring Town Clerk. Dinner was over. Men and women, reunited, talked and lounged in the great reception-room of the Town Hall. An eminent pianist played music in one corner; in another the Town Clerk stood ready to exchange a few sentences with all who approached him for that purpose.

'And what is Cayle?' asked Alice, in answer to the Bishop's apothegm.

'It cannot last,' said he. 'We are in a state of happy transition. We have the vitality of a manufacturing centre, while we retain the qualities of a cathedral town—what one may call the standardization of a cathedral town. We are all of one type, which is a blessed thing. But the old Cayle society will be lost in the growth of the manufacturing element.'

'Its last stronghold will be the tea-tables of unmarried women,' said Alice.

'For my part,' put in Mr. Willoughby, 'I have done my best to make the new element conform to the old. I have tried to become a humble member of the old Cayle society, and I have brought up my children to have the same ambition.'

'It is needless to say that you have succeeded,' replied the Bishop, who was born and bred in Cayle. 'Now, look at all those people. They are one brotherhood. They all know each other, and all strive after one ideal. Anyone who sets up for being exceptional in Cayle is

doomed. People in this town have much to be thankful for.'

'There was old Ridgway,' said Mr. Willoughby. 'He was doomed, as you say. He and his daughters tried to introduce London ways into Cayle, and they failed. You won't find them in this room. I expect you'd be more likely to find them at Monte Carlo.'

'We are not brilliant,' said the Bishop, 'and we do not want to be. We prefer to be sound. We can afford to let London go its own way.'

'You find London society very worldly?' asked Alice.

'I know very little about it, I am glad to say,' the Bishop replied. 'But if you read one of the books of Mr. Benson you will understand what I mean. We think differently at Cayle, and I think I may say, thank God! that we all pull together.'

'Where are we pulling to, do you think?' asked Alice.

'I don't understand,' said the Bishop.

'To somewhere where there's a good deal of money,' remarked Mr. Willoughby, winning a smile of approval from Alice.

The Bishop was a majestic man, with much white hair. He was a profound scholar and a great divine. He was deeply moved as he looked at the scene before him.

'There is nothing tawdry,' he said, 'about the people of Cayle.'

'No; I have never perceived it,' said Alice.

'In politics we may differ, but in social feeling we are one. And, between ourselves, Lady Alice, if Mr. Willoughby will forgive me, I always wonder why the people of Cayle are not more consistently Liberal. For I often think it is we Liberals who are truly entitled to the name of Conservatives to-day. It is we who conserve the ideals of public life, and Cayle is a place where those ideals are particularly strong in the hearts of the inhabitants. Cayle should be Liberal.'

'It is all a matter of personal liking,' said Mr. Willoughby. 'I don't believe in ideals. I respect them, of course; I honour them. But they're not business. Sir

Benjamin Mason's popularity will outweigh any ideal. Poor fellow ! it's a pity he can't be here to-night.'

'True,' the Bishop answered. 'Sir Benjamin is a splendid type of Cayle resident. Though his family is not of very long standing, he is so entirely respectable, sociable, and conscientious.'

'That's it,' said Mr. Willoughby.

'Are those the qualities of Cayle,' asked Alice, clearing for action.

'It is a proud boast,' said the Bishop, 'but it is a true one, as I can affirm after many years' experience.'

'Then please explain them to me,' said Alice. 'Take "respectable," for instance. I'm afraid I'm very stupid, but I never have been able to understand that word. My governess used to try to explain it, but we could never grasp her meaning.'

In this sentence the word 'we' explained the nature of the question. Alice was in arms on behalf of one whom she felt to be no true typical son of Cayle.

'What is the meaning of the word "respectable"?' said the Bishop, smiling. 'I have never been asked such a question in my life. Let me see. Well, look at this gathering to-night. That should explain it.'

'I can see that it is a little rigid,' said his pupil; 'but why is it respectable?'

'It is respectable,' said he, 'because it conforms to the proper rules of society?'

'And what are they?'

'They are the precepts of right social feeling,' said he.

'Who ordains those precepts?'

'Society.'

'Then society is respectable when it follows the rules which it ordains itself? Is everyone respectable when he follows out his own whims?'

'Our discussion serves no good purpose,' the Bishop told her, smiling. 'There are some words which anyone can understand without engaging in a logical analysis. Their meaning is self-evident to every right-thinking person.'

'I don't believe it has any meaning at all,' said Alice.

'It is a forged note which passes current because no one dares to expose the forgery and bear the loss. And as to the word "sociable," that is a perfectly colourless word of description wrenched out of shape to serve as a term of approbation in the mouths of bores. It is most unwarrantable. I don't mean that you are a bore, of course, because I know very well you are not, and you have just been proving it to me again.'

She would have proceeded to deal with the shortcomings of the word 'conscientious' had she not been checked by the arrival of a man some seven-and-twenty years of age, a sweet-faced giant in the clothes of a man of fashion, who strolled across the room to the corner where they sat. He was a fair man, who looked healthy and prosperous before he looked anything else. He had a small soft line of hair upon his lip, and the expression of his face was humorous in motion, tender in repose. This was Rupert St. Agnes, the Cayle representative of a great mercantile family. He managed his father's affairs in the town, and though he had lived but a year in Cayle, he had embraced the spirit of local society to a degree which, in a stranger born, could only be attributed to a dispensation of Providence. His popularity was great. By joining Alice's group in the corner, he made it possible in a few moments for the Bishop and Mr. Willoughby to go on an expedition to the region where the Town Clerk held his court.

'I'm acquiring a shocking habit,' said Alice, 'of asking people the meaning of what they say. It will make me very unpopular. There is nothing more annoying than to be asked a question you can't answer. I've been grossly rude to the Bishop, for instance. But he was abusing Charley—or, at any rate, he is abusing him now.'

She was not far wrong in her conjecture.

'Led astray by her scamp of a brother,' the Bishop was saying.

'Not a scamp,' said Mr. Willoughby. 'A little heavy and dull. But personally I like him. He would be all right if Wight were not shoving him into politics. He'll never do any good in politics. He can't talk. I've often

tried to draw him out in conversation. I've set the ball rolling between him and my own boys on some topic of common interest, like a comparison of his college and theirs ; but young Brandon simply isn't in it with my boys. Slow, unintellectual mind, you know. My boys can talk about Christ Church, and argue for any length of time—the other ones, I mean, quite apart from Henry, who ranks differently. But Brandon hasn't a word to say. Can't meet their arguments, you know. He'll never do for politics.'

'I have a very low opinion of him,' the Bishop answered. 'Indeed, he is causing me considerable worry just now, as I would explain to you if you were not a Tory. But apart from that, which I must not talk about, he has absolutely no sense of his duty to the town. Why, for instance, is he not here to-night ? He has not even the grace to appear at tennis and croquet parties in the summer, though he is the most prominent young man in Cayle, so far as birth goes.'

'That's true,' said Mr. Willoughby. 'And he won't play cards.'

'I'm glad to hear something to his credit,' replied the Bishop.

'But he hunts,' said Mr. Willoughby.

'Hunts, indeed ! Yes, but that is with the county people outside Cayle. That is neither here nor there. What I blame in him is his refusal to play the part which society allots him in this town. How is one ever to maintain the corporate traditions of the place if Lord Wight's son holds aloof and sulks ?'

Mr. Willoughby pleaded for Brandon as a student of history. Perhaps a quiet life was necessary for his reading.

'You can't expect students to be as sociable as other people. And very likely he will make more money and fame by writing history than by playing croquet.'

'That is an utterly pernicious sentiment !' the Bishop exclaimed. 'He was born in Cayle, or I suppose he was, and he lives in Cayle, and he should join in the life of Cayle. What is much more shocking, however, Mr.

Willoughby, is that he is actively encouraging the vices of the poor. His conduct is positively anti-social. Progress consists in the eradication of vices, and there is Brandon actually encouraging the very vices we desire to remove from the poor, and even teaching them the vices of the rich. He would like to unite the worst elements of society, the very rich and the very poor, by a common bond of iniquity. I suppose that is why he holds apart from the decent society of Cayle. He knows he has no chance of corrupting us. Our traditions are too strong. So he goes and corrupts the poor. Only to-night the Mayor was talking about this wild-cat theatre scheme—a most poisonous, reactionary proposal;’ and so on.

The crowd became thicker as they drew near the place where the guest of the evening stood. They separated to make their way towards him, constantly detained to say a few words to one or another of the people. The Bishop, had he listened, might have heard a number of remarks to prove how many of his flock held views like his own on the blessed state of God’s people of Cayle.

‘Look,’ said Mrs. Willoughby to Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, ‘there’s Lady Alice sitting alone in that corner with Rupert St. Agnes. Oh, the Dean is going over to join them. So like Lady Alice to sit alone, all out of the crowd. I’m glad there are not many people in Cayle who are as stand-offish as she is. She’s much too good for us poor unfashionable people of Cayle. We can manage without her, though.’

And Mrs. Russell discussed the Town Clerk.

‘They say he’ll spend most of his time in the South of France. It’s asthma. He’ll be a great loss to Cayle. He always made himself one of us—such a gift!’

‘They are quite new people,’ said Mr. Upworth in another group of talkers. ‘They’ve not lived in Cayle more than three years yet. Their name is Cooper. He had a large practice in London, but he sold that. Very well off, they are, I believe. I don’t expect he’ll practise much in Cayle. Cayle people will go to the well-established firms when they want law. I can’t think why

Cooper came here. I expect it was more for the society than for the business. That dark young fellow is his son—just called to the Bar.'

The same dark young fellow, elsewhere, was asking if these civic banquets were frequent occurrences in Cayle.

'They're not overdone,' his spinster friend told him. 'But we enjoy them. They show how friendly and contented we are in Cayle.'

Presently the sound of music from the piano suggested that people should sit down and hush their voices. A few chords and an obvious resolution sufficed for that. But as the talk died down, the notes of the piano grew more distinct and exciting, and in many places conversation gave place to listening. By one of the big fireplaces a majestic trio—Marquis, Mayor, and Bishop—made a comfortable and interesting resting-place for eyes that had ceased to flash with provincial wit and twinkle with the well-tryed humour of Cayle.

From the buzz of conversation to the liquid melody of the piano it was a change in the direction of quiet. Most people looked pleasantly relieved, for the clatter of many tongues had sounded the evening through. But it was a strange sequence of emotions that marked itself on the faces of the company as they merged from animation to repose, and back again to animation. Hardly had silence come before here and there some person pricked up his ears and looked about him for confirmation of his ideas—and he found it. They asked, 'What can it be?' They looked at the Mayor, who was a little deaf. His long, sanctimonious face was set in deference towards the Marquis. None had fed more emphatically than he. The swelling fervour of the pianist made louder demands on the appreciation of his hearers, but they had ceased to consider him.

'Is this a regular accompaniment of these banquets?' asked young Cooper of Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet.

'It's a demonstration in honour of the Town Clerk,' said she. 'Go and tell him—go and tell the Mayor.'

There was a dull roar of a great crowd in the square outside. Each moment it grew louder.

Roger Cooper, tapped on the arm by Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet's fan, went up to the Mayor, and told him what she had said. The Bishop, thinking he spoke from his own certain knowledge, bade him tell the Town Clerk, and open the window that led on to the balcony.

Several times the pianist looked round in irritation as the buzz of talk reasserted itself, and, worse than that, people were getting up and standing in groups. That this could be a mere street row was an idea scouted a dozen times in a minute wherever two or three came together to discuss it. But the Mayor was smiling. Cooper was pulling aside the heavy curtains of the window without a sign of agitation, and so most people were only agreeably excited.

When, however, Cooper was struck by a mass of broken glass and a brick fell rudely on the floor of the room, there was a general change of feeling. The noise also increased greatly at that moment. It was a strange way of doing honour to the Town Clerk. Someone told the pianist to stop.

The forethought of Nature had not intended the town of Cayle to be the scene of revolution. No playwright would choose it as a place for a howling mob and an aristocracy suffering the orthodox dramatic emotions of such a time. There are many poses—heroic, craven, reckless, mulish—which are suitable for the representatives of society at such times ; but in the Mayor's reception-room not one of them was properly achieved. The people of Cayle, as they perceived the noise of the fury of the mob and heard the reports of the men who ventured to look out of the window, neglected all their opportunities, and behaved with a pathetic lack of dramatic feeling. The girls stood and giggled. The matrons were simply nervous. The men were fussy. No one showed Roman fortitude, and no one gave way to interesting panic.

'Look at them,' said Alice to Rupert St. Agnes ; 'they have no precedent to rule their behaviour. They'd follow any lead. If Mrs. Russell were to shriek now, they'd all shriek. When they've talked it over for a

month or so, they'll settle what is the right kind of conduct for a Cayle person in the middle of a riot.'

It would be certainly unjust to judge Cayle by its Mayor. He, by the fire, with his group of grandees, was sweating with fear from the moment that he learned the hostility of the crowd. He had no idea of connecting it with the theatre proposal, for Brandon had treated him with a contemptuous civility that seemed to him more like acquiescence than anger. But he had a sense of the responsibilities of his post, the active part that would be expected of him, and the rude things the crowd might say to him and do to him if he were to go out on the balcony to inquire their grievances or read the Riot Act. The Bishop and Lord Wight discussed the matter without reference to him. Then Henry Willoughby came up and declaimed in front of the Mayor.

'You must go on to the balcony, Mr. Mayor,' he said, 'and ask these people what they mean. You have your official position. Come to the balcony. I will go with you. All the people are calling for you.'

'Henry is quite right,' said his ever-reverent father.

The humorous Dean was cool above all others.

'I'm afraid it is you that they want to have thrown down to them, Mr. Mayor,' he said. 'They are all calling for you.'

'The police must see to it, not me myself,' the Mayor declared, pleading with his greasy eyes that they should agree with his assertion.

'Roger Cooper has gone off for the police, if they're not here already,' said someone.

'We absolutely must send some person on to the balcony to address them,' Mr. Willoughby urged, glancing at his son for confirmation. 'It's always done. Would the Town Clerk go?'

'It is the duty of the Mayor,' said Willoughby.

But the Mayor showed not the slightest inclination, and the little group looked doubtfully from one to another, and at the increasing flutter in the body of the room. Two more bricks came in through the window. Then Lord Wight, as was the way with him, was saved from natural meanness by his blood.

'I will go and speak to them,' he said, and he walked across with an air of puny importance to the window.

The Bishop picked up a lamp, and followed him, with Henry Willoughby, on to the balcony.

It became known that all who wished could make a safe escape from the back of the Town Hall, where the streets were perfectly quiet. A good number of people took this course, led by Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet. Young St. Agnes went to ask his sister if she would care to go. Alice Brandon stood by the distressed pianist, and said a few gracious things to console him for the waste of art which was so much worse than any possible breaking of heads. There, as she was talking to him, she was approached by Roger Cooper, who had a message in his eyes, and more than a little hesitation in his manner. She liked him, for he was known to her as a secret admirer of Charley's.

'I hope the glass did not cut you,' she said.

'I have been outside,' he told her, ignoring her inquiry, 'and I saw your brother there.'

Alice moved away from the pianist, drawing Cooper with her eyes.

'Is he with the rioters?' she asked.

'Yes, and the police are surrounding him. They think they can stop it all if they can get hold of him.'

'I am very much obliged to you,' she said. 'Where is Mr. St. Agnes? I must speak to him at once. Come with me. No, there he is. Please bring him to me.'

'Mr. St. Agnes,' she said, 'I hear that Charley is with the rioters outside. The police are surrounding him. If you are his friend you will go and rescue him. I know the police will give him up to you if you promise to take him away. Mr. Cooper will go with you and show you the way. Please do not lose a moment. You know the importance.'

It was not for his friendliness or his physical strength that she chose St. Agnes to be her agent, but because with these he combined a full measure of that wonderful quality, that staple product of Cayle, described by the Bishop as respectable, sociable, and conscientious, which

would clothe his words with authority for any true townsman, from the Mayor to the constable of police.

The venture of Lord Wight awoke a certain amount of genuine feeling in the room, though it was of a kind that was new to Cayle. A good deal of sympathy attended the sad little nobleman as he stood on the balcony resting his hands on the balustrade, perfectly cool, in the light of the lamp, with his tall companions on either side of him. But here again the dramatic interest was short. No one in the crowd molested Lord Wight, or wanted to. Nor would they listen to him when he tried to speak. They merely shouted for the Mayor and the theatre. So Lord Wight washed his hands of the matter, and returned to the room.

'The police will settle it,' he said. 'I suggest that we continue our festivities in another part of the building, if you agree, Mr. Mayor.' The mind of the aristocrat saw no reason why a vulgar riot should disturb an august assembly; but the representative of middle-class authority had been told that the object of the mob was to intimidate him in the matter of the theatre, and he thereupon took the initiative, for the first time since the crisis began, in suggesting that everyone should immediately leave the building from the back. He himself proceeded to set the example. Lord Wight could but shrug his shoulders, for the affair was not his.

Thus tamely ended the revolution of Cayle, while the police were prevailing against the now leaderless mob outside. A couple of mounted policemen are very terrible.

Alice lingered in the room by the fire, while there was talk of cabs and carriages, and other weapons of defence. She was waiting and thinking. But her thought was all in error. She was reviewing old and well-tried methods of averting tutorial and paternal wrath, and of a mad little boy in periodical scrapes. Great was the strain borne by sisterly affection. Would it ever snap? It was a theory with her that Brandon's pranks were wildest long ago, and that time had put a natural check upon them. She had toyed with the figure of a tiny stream

winding erratically till it gathers enough water for starting on a steady course. She had proved it true in part. Many of Brandon's inconsistencies had healed up. Would they reopen in these reactionary courses of his? What a day would to-morrow be, she thought. The day after the scrape, and the old memories it brought! Sometimes a marvellous fortitude in punishment, sometimes tears and cries and all kinds of impatience. Those were the days of inconsistency indeed. She was bitterly angry with Brandon.

Rupert St. Agnes, for whom she waited, returned before the last of the guests had gone. She looked at him, and wondered what variety of bad news he brought her.

'You have failed?' she said.

'I could not persuade him. I tried. But he was set upon it. He has gone with the police. Nothing would stop him.'

Alice let him take her to her father, who was contemptuously watching the departing people on the staircase. She had now discovered the error that lay in her reflections, and was thinking of bookworms and practical politicians. She was always a little too logical to understand her brother. For he who went forth a reveller was returning an adventurer, while Dusky Williams posted off to Dr. Potts with news that would appear in to-morrow's Liberal papers under a heading in large type, 'The People's Martyr.'

## CHAPTER VII

'It's victory! it's victory!' cried a bald-headed man in the streets of Cayle next morning. He waved a loose umbrella so as not to be beaten in enthusiasm by the Irishman to whom he spoke. 'It's victory!' he said ten minutes later to a Nonconformist minister. 'Talk of your Education Act! I tell you we'll send a Liberal to Parliament from now to doomsday.'

'Have you seen Lord Charles?'

'I'm on my way.'

'May I come with you?'

They went together, Nonconformist minister and Dr. Potts, treading delicately and singing pæans.

Mr. Worthing was at the gates of Vitryfield. He had seen the Marquis for a moment.

'Critical, critical, very critical,' he said.

'There is a tide in the affairs of men,' said Dr. Potts. 'We've got our money on the favourite right enough this time. This is the hour of Liberalism in Cayle.'

The excitement was everywhere. Mrs. Russell put down the *Advertiser* at breakfast, and trampled on the Dean.

'You can make your mind easy on the score of hitting back,' she said. 'People at the police-station don't hit back.'

'Indeed! Oblige me by reading the article in the *Westshire Post*,' said the Dean.

Up at Sir Benjamin's they were fast in conclave.

'Now you look smart, young man,' the member observed, holding up one finger in the face of Willoughby. 'You'll find your work cut out for you. You've to fight a demagogue who'll stop at nothing.'

Little as Willoughby was inclined to credit the Liberals with the higher motives, he did not think so ill of them as to believe they would adopt Brandon as their candidate. Sir Benjamin said he was talking stuff and nonsense. Upworth declared that Brandon was ruined, and Willoughby concurred.

'At least you will agree, Sir Benjamin, that the present is not a suitable time for your retirement.'

The old man sniffed.

'Thought you were going to come in on the flood-tide of respectability,' he said, eyeing Willoughby with something more than the disapproval of the setting for the rising sun. But Willoughby explained that he was far from despising the wiles of the enemy. Besides, he could not, could he, make profit out of an incident so disgraceful as last night's? He had to consider the feelings of his supporters, however broad a view he might take himself.

The Liberal press, whose tone had so much alarmed the Dean, made no direct allusion to a Parliamentary contest. The editors had no wish to goad beyond endurance their friends who were of the Bishop's camp. Dr. Potts had warned them. But whether Brandon could or could not be welcomed to represent the party, he could at least be given the heartfelt sympathy of every democrat in the disasters that had befallen his great scheme and himself. Lord Charles had been ruined by the Tories with their Mayor. Then, said the *Westshire Post*, let there be no working man who did not show him in whatever manner possible that there were some who were grateful to him for what he had suffered in their cause. Let them recall his past—how he had ever been the people's friend. Let them soften his hour of defeat.

At the very time Dr. Potts was dictating this stuff in the newspaper office the same cause was defended not less energetically by Alice. The children of the devil, as the Bishop said, have their father's brand upon them, and the flock would not be deceived by them were it not that persons otherwise innocent so frequently assist in the dissemination of their wiles. There was Dr. Potts,

no more than an enthusiastic and somewhat vulgar Liberal, fighting Brandon's battle. There was Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet saying that Cayle society was responsible for the whole business. There was Alice Brandon using her fine brains to defeat the ends of justice. She was working on the old system. Keep Brandon away from his father till the first explosion of wrath is past, and then arrange a meeting when both are sorry for the bitter things they have said. She told him as they drove home that Brandon had led the riot. She assisted him in the preliminary work of reprobation. It was scandalous, disgraceful, and so on. So well did she know the line of discussion that the Marquis was fairly outpaced. Then her tone moderated slightly.

'You must really make him promise never to do such a thing again,' she said.

'I shall positively forbid it,' he answered; for at times of crisis he forgot all about liberty. Then came an allusion from Alice to the soldier brother in India, whose past treatment of the Marquis was enough to make Brandon appear still comparatively white. And when he was half-way through his nightly brandy a reconciliation was in full view.

So on the following morning he went off to bring the culprit home, and Alice, her good work done, had leisure to nurse her own annoyance. What is the value of being first in the confidence of such a person as Brandon? All his most important ideas dropped from heaven into his head at the very moment when he put them into action, and you never knew where you were. Where were they now? Was this a big electioneering trick, or was it a mere prank, or was it blind vengeance? But, alas! it was just when he was least rational, least inclined for deliberation, that she was least able to resist him. He came, and in the presence of Lord Wight Alice saw that the cue was to curse the Tories. Any stick was good enough to beat the Tories with. Last night's riot was a thick stick too. Where was the *Westshire Post*? Lord Wight was so near complete agreement that he felt obliged to retire to his room.

Brandon, in the clothes he had worn the night before, unwashed and unbrushed, looked a pretty ruffian as Alice gave him breakfast. But everything about him was a-sparkle. He must hear all—all about the scene in the Town Hall. His comments bubbled delight. Alice found herself imitating the Mayor, inventing speeches for Willoughby, touching up the picture in sheer pleasure. And then for his own adventures ; she was dazzled by the interest of it.

'But I was so angry with you last night. What did you do it for ?'

'Is that a question or an imprecation ?'

'Oh, it's an honest question. I really do want to know.'

He pointed out, with abundant gay dialectic, that it was absurd for her to blame him. Her anger was only jealousy, for if it were not for the regrettable accident of sex she would have been only too eager to share the fun. What a night it had been ! There had been nothing like it since the end of Oxford.

'But it wasn't for fun that you went to the police-station ?'

'Oh no : an article on prison life by one who has lived it.'

'In the *Westshire Post*,' said Alice, only delighting him by her mockery.

'Oh, but it's a fine day, and I can't talk politics when the sun is shining,' he said. 'We'll talk about it all day long to-morrow. To-day I'm going to enjoy myself. We'll ride.'

To Alice there was nothing at all surprising in this effusion of boyish happiness. Brandon was always happy when he was manifestly and justly in disgrace. It had been so from earliest days. But when he got up and said he was going to have a bath and dress himself, she had no patience to see her curiosity flouted any longer.

'Does it mean a fight, Charley ?' she said, insisting on an answer. And an answer she had, driven with all the force and flash of his blue eyes.

'It means victory.' But even then he was a warrior sufficiently light-hearted.

'Why didn't you tell me before?' she asked.

'I only thought of it as we were marching down Mercy Lane.'

'Was the whole thing a new idea?'

For a moment he looked puzzled.

'An old idea suddenly got up and kicked about in my head,' he said. 'But what does it matter? It's only a game.'

So Alice was left to battle with a new phase of her brother's psychology, and on the whole she was not ill pleased. It was the political life at last, though Charley might look serious and swear it was only a game. It was the world of healthy conflict, where there were allies and great interests, free play for thought and wits. That was what she wanted, and had so long awaited. She was sure that it was Charley's world.

'Dr. Potts and Mr. Adamson, my lady, to see my lord Charles. I thought you would wish to know they had come.'

It had come, the political life, at last. She was glad. She told the footman to bring them to her. Was this interview to be typical? she wondered afterwards. Was this why Charley called this new life a game? She took the damp hand of Dr. Potts, and emitted the brightest rays of graciousness on his companion. To the warmth of a hostess she added something of the partisan. Her brother was not yet dressed, she said, and all at once she realized, as they did, that the uppermost thought in their minds was tabooed. Perhaps it was because these men were not gentlemen, and with the Bishop or even with Mr. Worthing she might have felt differently. But to speak of last night to these men she was unable, and, indeed, the feeling was reciprocal. One allusion only was made, when Dr. Potts urbanely suggested that Lord Charles, pained by the disgraceful treatment he received last night, would be gratified by the people's sympathy. That was *à propos* of his great popularity among the lower classes, and Dr. Potts hurried on to other ground where the ground was safe.

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A political understanding, even though it contains an element of give and take, is, after all, a perfectly reputable thing. It may be even a laudable thing, and there is no reason for describing it as 'doing a deal,' or to introduce disparaging terms at all. One might as well describe holy matrimony as 'doing a deal.' Yet Alice, as she discovered what Dr. Potts was driving at, was unpleasantly repelled. He first fished for information about Lord Wight's intentions. Was he still eager for the candidature? That fact being happily established, he went on to discuss the Bishop, and Bishops in general. Every sentence was fresh and shiny with diplomacy newly laid on.

'Tricky-tempered man, the Bishop,' he said, and Alice smiled assent. She realized that Dr. Potts was here as a friend, the Bishop out there as the enemy. The Bishop might not regard Brandon's candidature as a blessing unmixed; yet Dr. Potts thought he saw his way to overcoming that objection, and others too. It was impossible for Alice not to make the mental comment 'for a consideration.'

Mr. Adamson, who was a Baptist, stated his position at this stage. He always addressed Alice *via* Dr. Potts.

'I fear Lady Alice will feel that I am taking a liberty in coming to this house unasked.'

'Oh, Mr. Adamson, I'm sure——' said she.

'But this matter concerns me intimately.'

What is a Nonconformist without his conscience? It was just a question whether that unruly member could be so far pacified as to allow Mr. Adamson to gratify inclination by backing the favourite. He had several points to ask Lord Charles; so had Dr. Potts, though he did not specify the points as conscientious.

'A good Liberal—a good candidate, that is—must be a broad-minded man, Lady Alice.'

'I'm sure of it,' said she.

'Mr. Adamson here will tell you there'll be many questions for Lord Charles to answer if we're to put this business through. I believe there's the temperance secretary coming to see him this morning. They're on the go this morning, I can tell you. I met an Irish

Home Ruler in the High Street, and pretty keen he was. Now, as I was saying to Mr. Adamson on the way, a sister's influence——'

Alice could not endure that, and laughed herself free of embarrassment.

'My influence won't answer any questions,' she said. 'You must go to my brother. You won't find him inclined to make difficulties.'

'A broad-minded man, that's what we want,' mused Dr. Potts, 'without any fads of his own.'

Then for a moment Alice was near to dealing Dr. Potts such a glance as she reserved for the enemies of Brandon. She kept a watch upon herself.

'Ah, well, we all sow our wild oats,' said Mr. Adamson, half to the others and half to his conscience. He had gone a degree too far, however, and Dr. Potts carried it off with a laugh.

'Come now,' he said, 'Lord Charles has sown no wild oats since the war, not to my knowledge. He's been a first-rate Liberal since then. And, after all, it's no more than Oxford rumours. He has no fads now, as I expect Lady Alice will assure us.'

But there came a footman with the card of a Mr. Somebody who was Secretary to the Western Midlands Temperance Association. And he, too, was brought into the conclave. Alice succeeded in keeping the talk to the subject of her lilies as seen through the windows.

The message came that Lord Charles would see the gentlemen in his room, and they were taken thither. To Alice came a scribbled note from her brother written in the mood of gaiety. She was to order horses, telephone for Rupert and Charlotte St. Agnes to join them, wire to the Wrexton Inn to have luncheon ready for four, wire to Bleeford Castle to say they would be there for tea. They were to go out into the country, it was clear, and make merry with the friendly hunting people whom Brandon had ever found acceptable. Alice was entirely pleased. A day with Brandon at his brightest was never a thing for his friends to scorn, and there was also the change of atmosphere. They would

breathe air unpolluted by Cayle hostility. Charley might be in the mood in which hostility seemed one huge joke, or it might be that he would have a rare mood of breezy tolerance, such as that in which he once declared the hostility of Cayle to be only a pardonable prejudice akin to the savage hatred he himself felt against the people who would not, for instance, take off their hats for 'God save the King.'

While she meditated, and before she stirred herself to action, Rupert St. Agnes came to Vitryfield for news of his friend. They took him to the library, where the politicians had sat, and between him and Alice the subject of the riot was discussed in all its bearings.

'So it means the beginning of a political career,' said St. Agnes rather sadly; for he had his own opinions in affairs of State, and they were not those of Vitryfield. 'It makes me all the more glad that I refused the Conservative Association's offer. I shouldn't have cared to fight Charley. It is much more suitable that Willoughby should be the opponent.'

'Has Henry Willoughby been definitely asked to stand?' said Alice.

He had been asked, and had accepted, St. Agnes told her. 'And now his cup of joy is full—fuller than poor Charley's, I'm afraid.'

Alice answered him in mock indignation.

'Charley was in the wildest spirits,' she said. 'No one could be better pleased with himself.'

'Is he in? Where is he?'

'He is at present engaged with Dr. Potts, a Baptist minister, and a temperance agitator.'

Their eyes met, and though they knew they ought not to have done so, they smiled.

'So you see he is busy,' Alice continued, instantly solemn again.

They saw the three men walking down the drive, and wondered why Brandon did not join them. They went out into the hall to find him. There were the tall cold pillars, the busts, the red rugs, and in the doorway the man to whom Alice had ascribed the highest spirits and

the wildest gaiety. True, he was dressed for the day of fresh air and horses he had planned ; but when he turned his head, they saw only a sulky schoolboy scowling hate.

'Oh, Charley, here's Mr. St. Agnes.'

'Oh, hullo !'

'So politics have begun in earnest, Charley ?'

'Oh yes, they've begun all right.'

'I'm awfully sorry Charlotte and I can't ride with you to-day.'

With an effort Brandon achieved a rough friendliness, took St. Agnes' arm, and walked towards the library.

'Never mind, we must have our fling another day,' he said. But Alice was quite sure he had long since given up all notion of riding that day, unless it were by himself upon the hills.

'They've come to grief,' said St. Agnes to himself as he remembered the political visitors.

'They've come to an understanding,' thought Alice, for she had more experience.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE near future had in store for Alice a time of stress and crisis immeasurably more acute than any that had come to her in the days of April and May, but none so dreary and heart-breaking. She was utterly friendless. What was Dr. Potts? A man of vulgarity and a swindler. Mr. Worthing was too tedious; the Bishop was her active enemy. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet and the brother and sister St. Agnes were Tories, and consequently unable to be called upon for comfort by the Liberal King-maker. Her father was out of the question as a confidant, for he was always in need of diplomatic treatment to bolster up his patience towards Brandon. And with Brandon, her natural ally, for the sake of whom she suffered everything, she was hardly able to talk on the subject at all.

Dr. Potts had said in his own admirable phrase that the man he wanted for candidate was a broad-minded Liberal who had no fads of his own. It took him some time to satisfy himself that Brandon was such a man. He would come to Vitryfield again and again, eager as could be for the favourite to let him mount and ride him to victory, and Brandon would be out, busy, ill, or merely unable to see him. Only Alice would appear. It was lucky that Dr. Potts could not hear the kind of talk caused by his visits.

'Dr. Potts is here, Charley.'

'I hate him! I won't see him.'

'But the harmless, necessary Potts, you must see him.'

'No, Alice, he worries me. I won't see him.'

'Then I suppose I must.'

'Will you? That's awfully good of you. Do go and talk to him, and, Alice, play for time.'

So Alice would go, meaning, perhaps, to play for time, but soon to be engulfed in the tear and hustle of the game which Potts was so energetically playing against the episcopal type of Liberal, the anti-Brandon stalwarts. Then Potts would ask suddenly some question as to Brandon's views. Was he sound against doles to the publicans? It was most important. And Alice would do her best. She had thought that this fight against high-placed Liberals would excite her brother's interest. It was only one degree less good than knocking the Tories. But the better the fight progressed the more worried and difficult did Brandon become. The psychological problem was fearful. He was gloomy. Not, indeed, that he would not blaze into excellent spirits at a dinner *tête-à-tête* or on a ride; not that he appeared anything but contented with his books of history and philosophy; but as a man of action it needed the greatest faith to acquiesce in his behaviour. For he forgot all the rules of the game. He forgot that a rolling stone gathers no moss, that being unstable as water, he should not excel; he even forgot that a stitch in time saves nine. He utterly refused to say if he wished to stand for Parliament or not. It was hard even to gauge the extent of his hatred of his enemies in Cayle. There was no consistent theory to be drawn from his remarks in the matter. He would curse and he would condone; it seemed to depend entirely on the nature of the epigram or metaphor he hit upon. And Alice, nevertheless, did not despair. She waited, as of old, for the moment when, as if by the movement of a switch, he would be charged with a thousand volts of animation, a current of resolve, and the fighting light would be in his eyes, and he would shatter the bridge of retreat.

So one day when she saw him crossing the hall before dinner with his hand on his father's shoulder, their heads nodding together, extravagantly pleased with one another, and when at dinner he charmed a couple of old aunts and shocked two City potentates from Town, she thrilled to hope and calculated triumph. If when he spoke to her alone he did nothing but chaff and prevaricate, it

was his way, and Alice waited for morning. Morning came. They brought her a note, and tears of annoyance came to her eyes. Brandon had bolted, had left Cayle by the early morning train.

'Curse me for a brute, and forgive me for a lunatic,' he wrote; 'but I am tired of Cayle, and I am off to London—Newmarket, perhaps. Put it right with father and Potts and Co. Go on with the campaign, and when you've got me in the last ditch you know I'll decide something.' And that was the man, she thought, who was to make the name of Brandon ring again!

The Bishop of Cayle preached a great sermon about Jerusalem built as a city that is at unity in itself. And in private the Bishop was clever enough to coin, or to transfer from Oxford, the word Brandonism. As he explained, Brandonite and anti-Brandonite were not necessarily identical with goats and sheep, bad and good. But the difference was subtle, too subtle for ordinary men, and in the sermon the sheep and goats were marshalled in all their pristine splendour. The Bishop was entirely negative. 'Change not, move not, think not; for if you do, you fools, you are sure to go wrong.' That was the burden of his preaching. He scented the battle in the distance, and went all lengths that decency allowed in specifying the combatants. It was a sermon which the Dean described as very suggestive, while St. Agnes said it was infernal ranting; but no one dared to say that he understood it.

Nevertheless, be it in essence what it might, the manifestations of Brandonism were many. A summerhouse in the Vitryfield woods; the clever Dr. Potts, whose rat-like features were far too small for the large bald pate above them; and Alice Brandon, looking like a criminal—these were in conjunction on a May afternoon. She loathed the man and his proximity, for he would poke his face across the little table into hers. Her disgust balanced with her business eagerness. Now and again, when hard pressed, she fell back into the recesses where she kept love and romance, and came back strengthened. She gave him money, as much as he would need to give

a dinner to his seven personal adherents on the Council. The Bishop's men were said to number eight, but no one knew if they had a rival candidate to propose. On the table lay a paper headed, 'Cayle Liberal Association : Executive Council.' Most of its thirty members had pencil-marks against their names—pro or con.

'The chairman is with us,' Dr. Potts reiterated till Alice was weary of the phrase; 'the press is with us; but these three temperance votes we are bound to lose.'

'My brother would scorn their help,' said she, from the clean pedestal of her own nature.

'The Dissenting vote depends on what authority you give me. It is very important, Lady Alice—very important.'

'Say what you like,' she answered. She had come down from her pedestal, and was gathering her skirts away from the mud.

'But this?' he asked, tapping a pink paper cut from an Oxford journal two years old. 'It is no good your showing me this for my own instruction. I must have it to show to them.'

'His views have changed, Dr. Potts.'

'So much the more necessary for me to have this paper. It has no date to give it away.'

Initiative is required of those who serve King Log. Someone, too, must do the dirty work, or it does not get done at all. Alice drew her skirts high above the mud, that nothing except her necessary feet might touch it. After all, it was Dr. Potts who made the mud appear so black. Once again to those recesses of her love, a bejewelled recollection of boyhood, words spoken red-hot from some flare of personal greatness, the tender joys of a sick-bed, and companionship the best of all. She lingered there and assented. The scene was a manifestation of Brandonism.

A few minutes later it was Dusky Williams who was with her. He, too, in a small way had made himself a lever to the Council; but there was no mud, or need for any artificial stimulus from the rare vintages of love.

Alice rose to dismiss him, holding out her hand. Her breath came sweet again after the nausea of the previous interview. For this boy was handsome, with eyes set wide in frankness. She saw that he was generous and strong. Loyalty was written on his face. His present business had added a tender, deep sincerity.

'Dr. Potts has been to see me,' she murmured.

'A bad lot, m'lady.'

'Yes, but we are bound to trust him.'

'He's right for this time, m'lady; but he only goes with Lord Charley because he knows Lord Charley brings in the votes.'

Dusky there touched one among the many sides of Brandonism.

'And you, Williams?'

'I, m'lady!'

'Yes, you. What makes you go with Lord Charley?'

'M'lady, it's a fight, and Lord Charley in it!'

Alice pressed his hand in the rapturous joy of alliance. This, too, was a manifestation of Brandonism.

Meeting St. Agnes as she walked home through the park, she took him into the house for tea. In her harassed state she had to pick and choose her words even with so familiar a friend as this. That he was a precious relief, indispensable, soothing her jarred nerves, was not a confession to be made in terms. He would not care to stand in any relation to Dr. Potts, even as an antidote, nor she to acknowledge weakness. One of the rare letters of Brandon to his friends had brought St. Agnes to give her messages. The letter told of visits to Newmarket, great purchases of clothing, young racing bloods for his companions in town and elsewhere.

'It's a critical time for him,' said St. Agnes. 'If he were any other man he would be looking after his interests here in Cayle.'

'If he were any other man,' said she.

'And you are doing his work for him?'

'Yes, I and the others.' She wondered if he had met Dr. Potts on the road, and she told him something of the interview. 'It's not considered safe for him to come

to Vitryfield openly now, so, you see, I am having lessons in conspiracy.

St. Agnes laughed, pleased to be told and not anxious to ask too much. They went in together to the little boudoir which Alice made her home of homes, where, among her books, pictures, memories, the storehouse of her strength was placed in Brandon's absence. She gave him tea, and could not wholly blind him to the darkness of her days. His indignation arose against Brandon, who caused it.

'Why did he go?' he asked. 'Why did he bolt like that?'

'Perhaps he was afraid of being rushed, or perhaps he had no reasons at all,' she said.

Rushed! Rushed into a decision after a whole fortnight since the riot spent in wilfully evading the issues. If he would not take it, why could he not leave it, and let his sister be at peace?

'Does he answer your letters?'

'He has written twice. But Charley never means business unless he telegraphs, and he has not done that.'

St. Agnes became quite impatient with Brandon. Nothing was easier than for Brandon's friends to be impatient with him when he was far away. Alice, for instance, seemed to take the greatest pleasure—rather a suspicious pleasure—in abusing him and elaborating all his faults. It was one thing, she said, to be unable to make up your mind, but to make a fixed principle of being undecided till you are forced to a hurried decision at the last moment—that is another thing, and quite unpardonable. Yet St. Agnes, as he heard the catalogue of horrible deformities, seemed to hear behind it the voice of the proud showman glorying in his freak.

From a drawer in her bureau Alice brought out a crumpled red envelope. She took a telegram out of it, and gave it to him smiling.

'What is this—a cipher?'

'Yes; it's one of the treasures in my museum.'

'I mustn't be so indiscreet as to ask what it means, I suppose? Sent off from Eton eight years ago.'

'Yes, and oh! after such a long time of twisting and turning and hesitation. It was the General Election, you know, and we were great politicians in those days. We had often thought what a splendid time we could have here at an election, and we made a plan for bringing him home from school in case the election came in the term time. And it did, you know, all of a sudden. I made my governess take me to Eton on purpose for Charley and me to discuss it. And he—well, you know, he was half inclined to do it and half not, half afraid and half eager, and he would hardly talk about it at all. For days after that, they told me, he was just like he is now—moody and dull and undecided. And then at the last moment came this telegram.'

'I know the story,' said St. Agnes, 'but I never heard of this telegram.'

'It was the turning-point,' said Alice, taking back the treasure into her hands. She sat down and let the dear memory possess her. Her dark eyes softened, her colour rose, as St. Agnes watched her.

'It is in cipher. The translation is: "Yah! blow the expense! Do it at once."' St. Agnes laughed, but Alice was grave.

'My father was in Scotland, and I sent a telegram in his name saying that Charley was to come home at once. That was what we had arranged. We were dreadful children.'

There was a pause, to Alice so delightful that her listener hardly had the heart to speak to her and raise her eyes of recollection.

'Dishonesty almost ceases to be dishonest,' he said at last, 'when discovery is inevitable from the first.'

'We knew that,' said Alice; 'but it lasted for two whole days, and I have never had such happy days in my life. I was sixteen; he was just fifteen. I met him at the station, and it was like a crisp spring morning all day long, with everything sparkling in the sun and a taste in the air. We were mad, we were indefatigable. We canvassed together day and night, and came home crazy with excitement. We knew that everything might be

discovered any minute, and we might be stopped, but that only made it more delightful. Mr. Grimsdale, the man who was standing against Sir Benjamin, asked us to go on to the platform at one of his meetings. It was madness, but we went, and they let Charley propose a vote of thanks. We rode about the town on our ponies, with people cheering us, you know. We were favourites even then. And all the time Charley was ablaze, dazzling everyone, full of wild ideas and unexpected answers and affection. And I was proud of him, you know, and he was proud of me, and nothing was too much for us. And we were always laughing and never tired. Then the end came, and everything stopped suddenly. I was shut up at home, and Charley was taken back, all changed, stubborn and angry, a stable-boy again. But it was wonderful.'

'It will come again,' said St. Agnes, in full sympathy.

'I know,' she answered. 'I showed you the telegram to make you say that.'

St. Agnes knew that the telegram had been brought out as a demonstration, not so much for him as for herself.

## CHAPTER IX

BRANDON sat in the smoking-room at the London house. He was alone ; for the time being there was no guest to keep him company. He put down his books, yawned, and remembered that it was time to dress for dinner. Besides, he was tired of novels.

While he dawdled from garment to garment, as near to thinking of nothing at all as it is possible to be, they brought him a telegram. He opened it, interested only to know if it were from one of his dinner guests to cancel the engagement. It was not ; it was in Alice's cipher. He sat down in an armchair, and took a pencil to work out the message. Six words he deciphered, ' Liberal Council met to-day and decided——' and then he put it down. This was doubtless the veriest petulance of childhood. He did not want to know what they had decided. He was not ready to know, and would not be told. He did not yet know what he had decided himself, and he was a great deal more important than they were. So he continued to dress, and his mental vacuum was restored. He was in no way annoyed that the Cayle Liberals had come to a decision. Should they have decided to ask him to contest the seat, then, as he knew, the official offer would be even now on its way, and the answer would have to be made. But that did not distress him, for as he finished his careful toilet he was quite aware that just as the telegram lay on the table ready to be deciphered when he chose to take the needful trouble, so, on the table of his mind, his own decision was ready and waiting. Yet he would not put out his hand to touch it. He would not think of it. He knew his own symptoms, and was sure that very soon his pampered, self-indulgent mind

would be ready for a change, and would demand to have the decision set before it, not as a nasty medicine, but as a desired dainty.

Everything pointed the same way. He sat down at his club to dinner with the men whom he had asked for the occasion. They were some of those who had been his companions for the past two weeks in Town and elsewhere. They were friendly people, kind to Brandon. Their conventions were such as he had no wish to offend. They had no intellectual heresies, for they had no intellect. Without morals, they were without intolerance; having no ambitions, they were free from jealousy. They found in the firebrand of Cayle a good-natured companion, with little to say and much to spend, and they chaffed him, patted his back, amused him, liked him. But on this Friday night, as he sat with them at dinner, he realized that they also bored him.

Then there was the musical comedy for which he had tickets, and that was tedious beyond endurance. Surely the indications of change were pressing on him now. The air was stifling. Several times he came back with a start as if from unconsciousness, felt for the horse beneath him, and jerked up his head impatiently to see that he was in a London theatre. There was an interval, and they dragged him off to drink and smoke; and there, as he stood by the bar in the midst of many men in faultless attire, with voices of his friends telling coarse stories across him—there, with no one who knew its meaning as it rushed into the blue of his eyes, the change came on him. He refused to go back to the play, made excuses, and said he was for home and bed. On the marble slab of the bar he put down Alice's telegram, and worked out the undeciphered parts: 'decided to ask you to stand . . .', and the official request is already on its way.' So Alice and her dogs of war had won.

Brandon walked out into a new world. He went to the night post-office in the Strand, and wrote out a lengthy telegram to be sent to Alice, another to Dr. Potts, another to an old friend who was Vicar of a place five miles from Cayle. Ideas were crowding on him now, decisions in

battalions, and if he was choked and distressed it was because he had no friend in Town with ears to hear his words. Action was coming, coming, coming, but the time was not quite ripe. As if in a dream the hours passed over him: the official offer was accepted, eight hours of sleep were come and gone, all engagements cancelled, and the next evening he was in the train for Oxford. A great need pressed him, the need for talk. To look back on the past weeks was a nightmare, to look forward was to meet a hurricane that would sweep him off his feet. He could not, alone in a train, look forward. It was a listener he wanted, who would stand beside him as he faced the mighty winds of the future, for which he craved and panted. He must see Venning, his Oxford friend, his mind's brother, and must talk to Venning as he had never talked before; and when he had talked he would act.

Again, the cab was rattling over the noisy stones; but even Oxford could not tempt him to give himself to memories that night. He leaned forward, tingling with vitality. This was the place at last, and there were lights in Venning's windows. Three immaculate youths were in the street by the door as he descended, merry as even the muscular Christian may be on a Saturday night. 'That fellow Brandon!' drawled one of them out loud. 'Good Lord!' said those on whose arms he leant. Brandon could have thanked them for the pertinence of their remarks. They had put the case for Cayle in five words more clearly than the Bishop could put it in as many sermons.

But the comparison broke down, for there was no one in the old cathedral town to champion Brandonism in the drastic manner of Oxford. Cayle might see the cause avenged in time. Oxford immediately hurled down a glassful of whisky-and-soda, and a long stream from the lips of a soda-water syphon. These were from a low first-story window overlooking the street. The three youths were admirably picked off. A professor of Billingsgate addressed them from the window, while Brandon on the doorstep would have slain the first of

them that tried to force an entrance. Only his craving for Venning as sole listener blinded him to the matchless suitability of the scene. This was how Oxford greeted him. In the room upstairs he found three friends, as there had been three enemies below. There was Venning, in whom no degree of intimacy could check a rather punctilious courtesy, and Nicholson, an old Union ally. The third was Blake, whom he had made with his own hands, changed from a ruddy schoolboy into a shrewd lieutenant of Brandonism. Hence the yell of 'Charley!' as he went into the room, the water and words from the window, the boisterous caresses upon his back and shoulders as he was steered towards the drinks. Brandon was again enfolded in peace, with all the world bound to him—Venning by intellectual sympathy, Nicholson by political association, Blake by the thousand soft ties that join those who have been drunk together, and will probably be so again. Yet he wanted only Venning.

He said that he meant to stay two nights in Oxford, and it pleased him to hear that Venning could give him a bed. But to ask an explanation of his movements or to show surprise was to drive him to a vaguely-troubled incoherence. Blake curled himself up in the window-seat as before; Venning stood by the fireplace. Brandon sat on the table, master of the tobacco and the whisky, but simple as a child in his obstinate wish for what he had come to Oxford to obtain. He took no part in a discussion on window-smashing in connection with those of his enemies whom Blake had recognised. Venning was against such vengeance; Blake was resolved to effect it. He grew a little tiresome in his virulence against these persons. Their very names were crimes. Nor was he restrained by Brandon's indifferently remarking, 'Dicky, you're drunk.'

Venning had greater success, however, at the next opportunity, when he said :

'Your entrance cut short a discussion of extraordinary interest. I was having my first lesson in statistics.'

Brandon repeated the last word as though he were asking what it meant. On his journey that day he had

read in the newspaper the speech of a most eminent man, and as he laid the paper down he had leant back on the cushions, a philosophic historian. An academic speech, he thought, and the pressure of more personal thoughts soon drove it from his mind. The mention of statistics did not in the least recall it. But he was compelled, against his will, to treat the matter seriously.

What was in Blake was the mental honesty of a landed aristocrat, fine or bovine as you choose to call it. If, on that sixteenth day of May, he handled the great Birmingham pronouncement in statistical gloves, it was not because he could manage the horrid things, but because he thought them free from suspicion of cant. Nicholson was quite different. He approached the question from above, while Blake climbed upwards from below. He watched his rival floundering on slippery stones; his own position in the cloudland of ultimates was safe. This was not a question of statistics, he said; there were words like truth, principle, unalterable law, and they were the words for this question. He was utterly the winner of the argument. Venning was mostly silent.

As a man of books and as an old political ally, Brandon was equally open to appeal from Nicholson.

'Dicky declares it's all a question of the volume of trade with the Colonies, or rather its expansibility. I've been telling him that has nothing to do with it.'

Of course Brandon agreed. Damn the volume of trade! So far, Liberals were united in treating the question as one of ideas.

'When Cobden settled the question sixty years ago,' said Nicholson, 'it was not a decision on the facts of the case, but an enunciation of a universal law.' The chariots of Liberalism and the horsemen thereof! 'As a matter of fact, it is more a question of philosophy than of politics.'

Brandon would agree even to this.

'And Chamberlain's mistake is in trying to plant it down on politics.'

Brandon began to jib. That was not the way to describe what he had read in the train, and called an

academic speech. He should rather have called it a philosophic speech.

'Chamberlain may be all wrong in his politics,' he said — 'I'm sure I don't care — but he is right in his philosophy. That's a bad way of putting it, but you can see what I mean.'

Nicholson, indeed, did not see. To the ears of a veteran Oxford Liberal there was a ring of true comedy in a defence of Mr. Chamberlain by use of the word 'philosophy.' It was more usual to hear that the Boers are dirty and the sun never sets on the Empire. Though the subject was then uncongenial to Brandon, he was forced to explain himself.

'Chamberlain hasn't done anything new. He has only been reading the tendency of public ideals. He has caught hold of the rising sun, and marked it "Made in Birmingham," the clever old devil !'

There was a protest from Blake on behalf of Mr. Chamberlain's honesty. Brandon acquiesced. He didn't care, not he, whether Chamberlain bagged the ideal or the ideal bagged Chamberlain.

'It is an ideal of reaction,' said Nicholson.

That remark seemed to Brandon so homelike that it made him angry, but he answered civilly. He knew that, though you may insult your elders, only a fool is rude to those younger than himself.

'Call it reactionary, if you like. When one is in a tight place one is generally reactionary. One goes back to primitive instincts. There is no idea more reactionary than self-preservation. That's what makes gibberish of the whole rotten lot of Liberalism and Conservatism. The world is getting into a tight place, because it's overcrowded. England is in the tightest place of all. The tendency of the age is towards a cohesion of States into self-sufficient economic wholes. No one will ever hear of foreign trade in a few years' time ; there won't be any all the world over. That makes things hot for a barren island with forty, fifty, sixty millions of people. That is how we get the new ideal in this country.'

Venning, whom the sound of Brandon's voice had

carried back to a delightful past, was more particularly pleased by his boyish impatience of the whole subject. As he sat on the table, swinging his legs and looking down at his feet, his was hardly an attitude in which to cast world-wide prophecies across the space of centuries. But the others supplied stimulus to keep the speaker up to the mark. It was not necessary for Venning to intervene.

Very earnestly and conscientiously Blake made a difficulty of India. If it were not for India, Mr. Chamberlain would stand a better chance.

'There are many far more serious difficulties than that,' said Nicholson. 'It's a question of Protection,' he added; and Blake fell flat at the sound of the awful word.

'India can go and be hanged, and so can Protection,' said Brandon rather testily. 'They won't make any difference either way. The merits of this question won't matter. The only important thing is whether the new ideal catches on, or rather how long it takes about it.'

'It will never catch on; it is fundamentally opposed to progress,' said Nicholson.

'Then progress will jolly well have to see what it's about.'

'It means taxing the food of the people, and they'll never consent to that,' the Liberal answered.

'Do you think Chamberlain will win, Charley?' said Blake.

Brandon yawned.

'Oh yes, he'll win. He represents the idea of national aggressiveness on organized lines, and that has won already among the people who are going to make the future. It has won all the world over except in England, and England is bound to follow. Chamberlain's ideal will win everywhere, even though England is smashed up first. And it will win here, too, as a matter of fact, because the old cosmopolitan idea is played out. It has held the field since Waterloo, and now everybody wants a new one.'

'But will the man in the street understand that?'

'No, he won't. He'll decide the question on different lines. It's his way. He chucked Home Rule, for instance, because Parnell got into the Divorce Court. The reason why Chamberlain's idea will win is that it will capture the cleverest men, and they will naturally be cleverest at duping the man in the street.'

'This is rank heresy,' said Nicholson.

'Yes ; that's why I like it.'

'The real truth is that Free Trade is one branch of liberty, and the nation has an inalienable natural right to it.'

'No one,' Brandon answered, 'has a right to anything except to die.'

He sighed, pained at being driven to such a platitude. But Nicholson winced. It was the meanest thing his friend had ever done. Taking sweet counsel together of old, they had learned this fashion of language in abusing the Tories, which Brandon now used in defence of Mr. Chamberlain. This was not playing the game. It was an act of treachery, besides being very confusing. To make such use of the consecrated weapons of Liberalism was like quoting Shakespeare to prove that there is no such thing as poetry. Brandon might defend the Tories if he liked ; he ought, at least, to stop using the language of philosophy.

Blake also found a grievance, for he was deceived. He was a hereditary Tory, and before him was the man whose friendship was his pride, whose mind was the object of his reverence, in whom the political blemish had stood alone. He rose and stood in front of him, drawing the attention of the others. He stood with legs apart, and perhaps he was a little drunk. His hair was disordered, and the colours of his waistcoat, shirt, and collar marked him in Oxford for the type of man he was. But he was capable, they knew. As a farmer or a banker he would have been successful.

'Why, Charley, you're a regular Tory !' he said.

Brandon smiled and shook his head.

'At any rate, he has shattered his last chance of claiming to be a Liberal,' said Venning ; 'but, unfortunately, that does not imply Conservatism.'

'I am Liberal candidate for Cayle,' said Brandon, as if that settled the matter.

'You devil!' said Blake, considerably disappointed.

But he was aware that he ought to take Nicholson away and leave his friend to talk to Venning. There was never jealousy among the friends of Brandon. And virtue was rewarded. Brandon promised to ride with him and dine with him next day.

So the High Street rang with the hero's praises, as Blake and Nicholson walked home part way together.

'What a head that chap has! He cut you to pieces. You'll come to dinner to-morrow night? We'll have a room at the Clarendon. I'll get all the old lot who are still up. Lord! it's living again to see Charley in Oxford. I tell you what it is: if I got in a scrape anywhere, I'd send for Charley; I know he'd come. He's a sportsman. I believe he's a damned religious sort of chap really, though you wouldn't think so. He has stuck to every one of us through thick and thin, and he never smashes anyone unless they try and smash him first. By God! he's the pluckiest man alive!'

Meanwhile, in Venning's room Brandon heard criticism less kind. To see what he had seen, to have said what he had said that night, and then to wash his hands of all but the trumpery politics of a sleepy Midland borough, in Venning's eyes seemed treason. He pronounced it sophistry to separate politics from history and philosophy. Brandon made no attempt to do so. He said he lacked interest, not perception. He was no specialist. Politics were a game, and he had many games. He was an amateur by profession. Just now he was playing for a seat in Parliament, or, more correctly, he was playing to capture Cayle. It was not a political business at all. It was something very different from politics.

He no longer sat upon the table. He was walking about the room with short uneven strides. Now and then he jerked back his head, excitement tugging at the muscles of his face.

The Liberals! He had no wish to convert them. They were past conversion. That was an academic

question. Academic also was Chamberlain and his policy. Let the politicians see to it. Brandon was playing another game.

Venning had only to give him a touch here and a push there to bring him to the place whither he was hastening with so great an eagerness. The room was charged with feeling, though Venning was calm. It was like a hall filled with multitudes of people expectant of the words of an orator. Had the glasses danced on the table and the pictures trembled on the walls, it would have passed unnoticed in the hurricane of life that swept round Brandon as he walked. A moment was coming, not of greatness, but of lightning brightness, when for once and for an instant he would show a great space of his then existing nature, while a million atoms crashed together in one bolt of articulate resolve.

His talk was swift and uneven, for he wanted to say it all in one moment. Often he stopped with a jerky laugh. Sometimes he was apologetic, sometimes husky with passion. There was a flavour of the stables, a liberal peppering of expletives. Venning filled his pauses.

He was a little boy, mocked for timidity, scolded for dirtying his clothes, whipped for disobedience. He took refuge in the stables, whence they dragged him away lest he should learn to swear. From the tyranny of governess and tutor he passed to a school. He did not like the cold bathing in the Vitry; they called him coward. To restore his honour he organized a Derby sweepstake in the school; they shunned him as something unclean. He went to a boarding-school, and was taught that to be clever was to learn by rote, to be good was to obey unthinkingly. Of these maxims, he ignored the first, and was called dunce; the second he combated, and was branded as a dangerous character. There were the boys against him. He began to cry while repeating a poem in school; they gave him no peace for weeks. He used a few words from the stables, and they refused to speak to him. There were also masters against him, who would beat him at one moment and slobber prayers and morality the next. He was sent to Eton, and things improved. He returned in

the holidays to Cayle, where they tried to keep his sister from him. He went to a race-meeting, and parents told their sons to avoid him. He galloped on the Long Meadow on a Sunday afternoon, and it was mentioned in next Sunday's sermon. The curse of the motherless was his, for an army of relatives assumed direction of his life. They lectured him with infinitesimal experience and morbid morality, with bad observation and worse psychology. If he read a novel they blamed his waste of time; if he read poetry they recommended golf. If he tore his clothes he was slovenly, lazy if he lay in bed, casual if he did not say good-morning. They judged his wits by his progress at school, his virtue by the respect he paid to themselves.

The voice of Venning murmured that these days were past and gone, like the first down of the ugly duckling. What did it profit to recall them? Vengeance is the shortest of pleasures.

'Why, even I would not have much pleasure in telling them what fools they had been.'

There were the days at Oxford, within the knowledge of Venning himself. They scented Brandon as one a trifle different from them, and sent up a yell of fury to compel conformity with every whim and fancy and fashion of the place. Violence was repelled by violence; the hatred of many was neutralized by the loyalty of few. Finally, their wearied venom took shape in a general verdict of self-satisfied assurance that he, flashy, rebellious, undecorated, coarse, would not succeed in life.

Oxford was past, but Cayle remained. In Cayle were the old men who had shaken their heads at his childhood, the mothers who frowned at his holidays, the boys who had railed at his weakness and disapproved of his strength. At Cayle were the dinners where solemn heads wagged to condemn him for the next world, while fat stomachs comfortably foretold his ruin in this. There were diligent young men in Cayle, with testimonials from school and college. There were specialists of every class, youths who sat eight hours on office stools, some who read through literature to improve their minds, lawyers who

might become town clerks, doctors with diplomas, writers with ready pens. They might not know one another, but all knew the scapegrace of Vitryfield. For what fault did they condemn him? They had charity, had received their prodigals and screened their offenders. Brandon alone was beyond forgiveness; for he alone, by his life and words, threw off the sway of that insensate system—the base coinage of wisdom learned by rote, the aping morality, hollow proverbs, words without meaning, conventions without use or beauty—which it pleased all Cayle to serve and worship, and to substitute for religion, learning, mind, and virtue. His crime was that he spoke his own language and lived his own life.

At some such point as this Venning held up his hand in alarm.

'Stop a moment,' he said. 'I must not be taken to assent to this. This is fearful. It is the cry of an anarchist. Your intellectual view is right, but your anger is carrying you into madness. You will be throwing a bomb.'

'Bombs are the weapons of impotence,' said Brandon. 'I, am not impotent. It is simply this: they have challenged me, in the family, at school, at Oxford, at Cayle—they have challenged me to show which type is better, theirs or mine, and now they have damned well got to take the consequences. I am tired of fighting in self-defence. And listen to this: I have tasted blood. I have felt my strength.' He told the story of the theatre proposal and the riot. 'So the scoundrelly politicians have put their money on me, and I have wriggled into the candidature. I shall get a heavy working-class vote. Before I am twenty-three I shall be a member of Parliament, and then they can explain it as they like. They can put their damned heads together—cousins, schoolmasters, Cayle society, and all—and if they can't understand it, they'll have to admit that I've got God working miracles to help me.'

There was something worse than this. He explained that a seat in Parliament was not all that he could achieve to mark his victory. There were municipal

bodies. If necessary, he would capture these, that his enemies might fear as well as wonder, that his demonstration might not only jar their sentiment, but stalk as a terror into their homes. Why should he be moderate with Cayle ?

Though Venning had some wish to rebuke him, he knew the story and its truth too well. It would have been like rebuking a law of Nature. He saw nothing in Brandon's attitude but what was inevitable and terrible ; his hope was in the future. He heard the latest tale—how Dusky Williams was dismissed by the motor company three days since, an act of wanton warfare whose enormity, as he saw, now for the first time striking Brandon's mind. The subject led to a strange side view, displayed with some self-consciousness, in difficult sulky, tones.

'There are about a dozen of you fellows who have believed in me and stuck to me, and a few women. The opposite gang would like to see them smashed as well as me, but they shan't. Think of Dicky Blake. When he joined me he did a cleverer thing than they've ever done. Damn it ! you know what I mean. I won't have people telling them they backed the wrong horse after all.'

Venning measured the distance between his friend's desires and his own.

'And so,' he said, 'it is not enough for you to know what I think about you ? I am a better judge than anyone in Cayle, you know.'

'No, it is not enough,' said Brandon.

'Blake is a better sportsman than the boys who used to bully you. He would give his life for you. Your sister is a greater lady than any other in Cayle, and to her you are the only man in the world. You say it is not enough ?'

'No, it is not enough,' he answered. 'I am not fighting for appreciation ; I am not fighting even for liberty at this time of day. I am fighting for vengeance and for self-assertion. They have bullied me, and I will smash them. They've called me a rotter, and now they shall feel my fists. They say I am wasting my life, and I'll show them that in a year I can make myself tyrant

of Cayle. They call me unpopular ; they shall find that I can make a dozen slaves where they can barely find three men to offer them a cigarette. I'll rise above every man who has ever said a word against me.'

It is a rudimentary desire of man, when fed, to express his personality and make his type prevail. Brandon's position was based upon this. That he thought himself the victim of exceptional circumstances was an error of theory ; it made no practical difference. It is a fungus common enough on personalities. Circumstances had done no more, in point of fact, than select the channel of expression through which the dynamic force of his personality should drive. He was a warrior born, to whom defeat would be more tolerable than peace. He had fallen into the eternal conflict that rages between those whose philosophy is in great part a deduction from their own temperaments and those others who draw more largely upon the temperament of a social group. Therefore, driven to express his personality in fight, he chose the nearest field, while encouraging fancy suggested specious reasons for the choice.

'I was born for a quiet life with books and horses, but they have made me fight like a tiger to keep the skin upon my back. I have fought in self-defence, but now, as I told you, I have tasted blood, and in the future I shall fight to win. I do not want a bomb, because I'll be a bomb myself. I'll blow them to dust while they are droning out that unity is strength. I have taken up their challenge. I would have lived my life as their equal, but they would not let me ; and now, by God ! I'll live it as their master.'

## CHAPTER X

THE despotic British public, like the Emperor Gallienus, experiences an interest in politics in the form of sudden short spasms. The complaint never becomes chronic. If by his arts the politician has introduced political virus into his victim's system, he must use his opportunity while the seizure is still acute, or there will be a return of normal torpor that will forestall him. It is impossible to keep the nation or a constituency in a lasting state of political paroxysm. What the summer months brought to Cayle was a period of intense activity following on many tranquil years. The sitting member could not make up his mind as to the date of his retirement; he wobbled between promises of instant resignation and protestations of party loyalty. Nor did his attitude become more intelligible as his heart grew warmer day by day with dislike of his successor, and a delicious confidence that all things, even a peerage, come to those who can wait.

An eminent Government lawyer came and drew clamorous applause by saying that the Opposition had no leaders at a time when they, the Unionists, had a leader whom they loved more dearly every day that passed. Cayle seized the watchword. Political ideas being somewhat unpopular, the party leaders rallied round the personal banner of the captivating Minister whom Willoughby supported. There were no cranks in Willoughby's camp, none who did not efface personal oddities to preserve the homogeneity of the party. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet presided at middle-class tea-parties, St. Agnes at smoking-concerts, the elder Mr. Willoughby at select dinners, and even the rising din of Fiscal con-

troversy was drowned by the cries of 'Chamberlain for ever!' The untiring candidate hurried from place to place, speaking for the Primrose League, giving prizes at a cattle-show or a swimmers' competition, watching the drilling of the boys' brigade, and attending church three times each Sunday. The only step not taken was to make a frank demand of each man as to the number of shillings he would take as the price of his vote. The Corrupt Practices Acts are against this, being designed to remove bribery from the sphere of cash to that of personal adroitness.

This activity was for a time confined to the Conservative party; then came a day when the Liberal papers announced that Lord Charles Brandon was coming home. The news was hinted, contradicted, reaffirmed. He had been absent almost a month from Cayle, and the third week of May was wearing out.

At last, on a Saturday afternoon between four and five o'clock, a crowd of people gathered in the space outside the railway-station. It was a rumour that brought them, heard by some at the factories that morning, by women at the market, by children at school. The day was fine, as the observatory clerk had foretold to Dr. Potts the previous night. Fine weather, of course, has caused more riots than either drink or theology, and therefore it was quite open to contemptuous observers to say that this concourse was rather a tribute to the spring than to the people's hero. The answer is that events should be weighed by their consequences, not by their causes. A personage enters London: the people go out to see him, sensation-hunting, and are tuned up to a pleasing frenzy, not really because he is a personage, but because they all together are a crowd, and have loud voices. On reaching home, the personage has secured a hundred thousand adherents. Thus the people of Cayle, the working people, found themselves both impressive and picturesque. They brought to the station-yard what little gay colouring they possessed, some red and yellow hats on the young women's heads, and a few flags to wave. The sunshine made them humorous. A man and

woman exchanged hats, and none within ten yards could stand up straight for laughter. There was much bandying of nicknames, with ceaseless use of those ready-made jokes, of which the most serviceable modern specimen is the 'Bill Bailey' that is said to have amused for four years the people of the United States. In one place the occasion produced a man of genius. He formed a big circle of persons dancing hand-in-hand. That exactly met the need of time, and it was comic to see how the old men sweated. A band played at the gates of the yard. The crowd's good-humour, however, was not above class prejudice, displayed in the hoots and jeers that met one or two carriages as they drove towards the station or along the road outside. A year ago such a thing would have astonished Cayle. The impression was that an old-fashioned barouche with a podgy coachman represented what had killed the people's theatre and kept their hero for a whole night in prison. The leaders of opinion had said so.

As the time came for the train's arrival, Dr. Potts, in a dog-cart, drove into the yard and was cheered.

'Ten minutes more,' he said, as he climbed down; yet he knew quite well that the train was not bringing Brandon at all.

A little later came the town's most brilliant equipage, two high-stepping horses with a gleaming carriage, the Marquis's coronet upon it. Cheering began in the faint distance, increasing in warmth and volume among the thicker crowd around the gates of the yard. Inside the yard the ripples of happiness, humour, and excitement were drawn into one wave of enthusiastic shouting, and Lady Alice, from the carriage, made acknowledgment beyond the scope of art or policy. She knew, with Dr. Potts, that the train would not bring Brandon any more than it would bring Beelzebub; yet she was obviously and radiantly happy. With her was a friend of her own age, half amused and half embarrassed. Till the carriage came to a standstill at the station doors she reflected the sunshine in her smiles and bows, her ready sensibilities for once allowed to lie open to the warming influence of

general approbation. There was not a grimy hand that she would not have liked to take in hers, nor a cheer which she could not have answered with her thanks. Here was her armour put off and amends for many wounds she had taken in the battle and must yet take. Even to Dr. Potts, when he stood at the carriage-door, she could show graciousness unlaboured.

Half a dozen policemen had come into the station-yard. Was the police force provided, one wonders, as a statesman said of parish councils, to amuse the people? If so, it has been a great success. A constable standing in front of the carriage had his helmet knocked off by one of the horses, which tossed its head against it. There was a yell of amusement as whole-hearted as when a man sits on his hat in the House of Commons. Had the helmet afterwards appeared battered, the effect might have been really dangerous. Then a counter-attraction began.

By the gates of the station-yard the road crosses over the railway. The bridge commands a good view of the yard. Some people had posted themselves upon it, preferring the better view to the more intense sensation which could be obtained in the yard itself. From them, just as the mirth around the policeman's helmet was waning into a state of contented grinning, there came suddenly a little burst of cheering. The component voices were not many, but in the passion of their tones there was that which turned on them the attention of everyone who heard. The band, playing a sloshy march, stopped dead. No one could suppose this marked the arrival of some mere popular figure to swell the crowd or meet the train. It was something more. And acute persons realized that such quality of cheering could only mean the presence of the thing itself that was the object of their congregation. A rush was made to get out of the yard into the road. The intelligent bandsmen started to play the tune of the 'Jolly Good Fellow.' Pressure of the crowd, however, left neither breath for blowing nor space for drumming.

One may join with Liberal partisans in saying that no

chance was more fortunate, with Dr. Potts in whispering that no stroke could have been more happily designed, than this unexpected arrival of the popular hero on horseback on the railway-bridge. It appeared that, instead of coming by the afternoon train, as announced, he went on the previous day to stay with a neighbouring parson, who had the three almost incompatible qualities of gentleman, Liberal, and Brandonite. With him, an amiable and popular man, Brandon rode by way of the station into Cayle. On horseback he was seen at his best. The fruit of visits to his tailor was evident in clothes artistically perfect for his needs, a daring cut, just scented with the stables; for it was partly as a sportsman that these townspeople admired him. A rare flush of colour had come to his pale cheeks, and the sunshine laid emphasis on a waistcoat which the Elizabethans would have called brave. There was his black-habited companion in contrast; there was the shimmering blackness of his horse. But whether it was his gay colours, in the merry delight of the people, or in the May sunshine itself that brightness was sought, there was nothing like the radiance of Brandon's face. Jollity had never been his characteristic, but now, on coming as the people's hero into Cayle, it seemed that he had summoned all the freshness of youth to grace him. He was a boy. The crowd pressed around him, and he was blushing, embarrassed, pleased. Their cheers alarmed his horse. He had the prettiest skill in managing it. He pulled off his cap like a schoolboy going back with a big score to the pavilion. In spite of his enjoyment, it seemed that his modest wish was to escape from such publicity could he have done so without hurting the feelings of his friends. But escape was indeed impossible. From the station-yard and from along the road people pressed round him like bees, their shouts and hats and handkerchiefs proclaiming their enthusiasm. There were hundreds of women among them, perhaps outnumbering the men. Commonly in scenes like this there is a contrast between the animation of the crowd and the stately aspect of their hero, but Brandon showed vitality as

much as those who cheered him. He was openly delighted, now smiling at the people, now laughing with his parson friend, or patting his horse's neck, yet all the time sufficiently embarrassed to remove suspicion of playing to the gallery. His breeding was as perfect as his horsemanship.

Progress was slow from the first, and much slower where the station road narrows into East Street. Here he came to the region of windows decorated lovingly but poorly in his honour. The crowd became a long procession before him and behind him, with sometimes an attempt at marching order, and songs and shouting incessantly. Less enthusiastic people formed a thick line along each pavement, among whom the hero gave cheery signs of recognition to those he knew and many he did not. In East Street Dusky Williams fought his way to Brandon's side. The people saw their meeting. The chief bent down and shouted something laughingly in his lieutenant's ear, bringing a caressing hand with a fine thump on his shoulder. Lucky Dusky! in view of everyone.

The Market Square is in the middle of Cayle, geographically and otherwise. The Town Hall, the Theatre Royal, Queen Victoria's statue, and the cathedral itself, are part of it. It was here that Brandon not two months since had come as a drunken rioter with his mob against the Mayor's authority, and now he came again. His friends the people poured themselves with him out of East Street, and filled the wide space round him with enthusiasm that was too light and joyous to pause or cease or moderate itself. Some of them, perhaps, remembered the last time he had led a crowd in the Market Square. Did they trace a connection between the two incidents? To the people he appeared as a friend and a hero, one of those from the great world who had chosen to make himself their own. The women saw his boyish smile, and could have kissed him and fingered his fine clothes. For the young men he was a sportsman on a horse. The tie of youth secured them, and they knew that as a boy he had fought with his fists in their streets.

On another day, should chance bring him with any one of them, he would laugh and drink with them. But stranger far was the feeling of older men—men verging on the middle age—who gave themselves to this infatuation. They had heard the leaders of Labour speaking, had the ideal of their trades-unions to hand; yet they shouted for Brandon, and felt that in so doing they were honouring themselves. They had walked through the Market Square before this, telling themselves that the Mayor was no better than they; only with Brandon in their midst could they make that boast and feel it true. For the bulk of mankind an ideal is little use without an idol.

Someone told him, erroneously, that his sister was in one of the carriages across the square, so he made his way in that direction. In the square the crowd was sparser, but the recognitions came more thickly. A child was lifted up to give him a great bunch of wild-flowers. He replied with a piece of gold, following on the engaging acknowledgment: 'Oh, thank you! They are pretty!' Yet Dusky Williams, walking on his other side, was charmed by a humorous glance and the question: 'What the devil ought I to do with these?' Brandon was very short-sighted. Though his mount gave him command of the view, he was obliged to make his way to the right-hand carriage of the line that he might find his sister as he passed from right to left. It was his first taste of victory. He put on his cap, that he might have some means of acknowledging the frigid bows of the ladies in the carriages who knew him. It was then that he saw old Mrs. Hedge standing on the steps of the theatre.

'Really Charley Brandon looks quite handsome to-day,' said a daughter of Cayle in her carriage, struck by the sunny glance that was sent over her head to the old woman. She had from her mother the apt reply that handsome is that handsome does, which disposed of Brandon's claims. But something of the boyishness passed off his face. He was scanning the carriages, the cheering still continuing round him.

'How angry they must have been!' said Alice. 'Did you enjoy it?'

That was after she had forgiven him for the day's follies. It had been a flaunting triumph in face of the foe, but at the moment there was more of stern tightening than of enjoyment. Sternness was what came into his face; nor was the effect lost upon the people who saw it.

'This demonstration will be a blow for young Wyloughby,' a wife remarked as she sat by her husband in her carriage.

'Brandon has yet to learn,' he told her, 'that God is not always on the side of the big battalions.'

That man was one of his more dangerous enemies.

Though he could not find Alice in any of the carriages, there was the rotund form of Mr. Worthing in the last of them, prosperous with the legal affairs of half the borough, and oozing with the importance of the Liberal Association, over which he now presided. He was in a brougham. Brandon saw a means of escape, gave the horses to the care of Dusky Williams, and got in with his parson inside the brougham. He waved farewell to his friends in the square, and begged Mr. Worthing to drive him to Vitryfield.

'A thousand congratulations, my dear Lord Charles! A splendid success!'

'Yes, they came up to the scratch pretty well, didn't they?' said he, alluding to the people.

'First-rate, and not more than four of us in the secret!' Mr. Worthing replied, mistaking his meaning. 'Potts has worked like a nigger; so has young Williams. I've offered that boy a place in my office. Potts will square the press to-morrow. But it's to you we owe it, my dear boy. Not twenty-three, and such a hero! 'Pon my word!'

This might have continued all the way to Vitryfield, but Brandon's animation was much too intense to let him listen. He pointed to a poster in the street.

'That play at the Theatre Royal, and that woman!' he said. 'The devil! that's pretty thick for Cayle!'

'Never you mind,' said Mr. Worthing comfortably. 'I'll make that all right. I think I see my way to making it all right.'

'All right? Why, what's wrong?'

'Haven't you heard? Oh, nothing of any consequence. The play is only on for one night, and some of our friends have been trying to stop it.'

'The Bishop's party?' said Brandon, laughing.

'Now come, Lord Charles; we've no parties. They're our friends; but now they want to hold a big Liberal meeting on the night of the play, with you to speak.'

Some of the sternness returned to Brandon's face. He controlled himself.

'That'll be all right,' he said. 'There'll be no difficulty about that.'

'Oh, none, none,' Mr. Worthing answered. 'But at present Potts is rather against it. We must hit on some compromise. Don't you worry yourself. I'll see to it. But take a hint from me, Lord Charles, and don't mention this play to your father.'

'Is he angry about it?' asked Brandon.

'Very angry,' said Mr. Worthing.

They had escaped beyond the last stragglers of the crowd; the last cheer had died away. Brandon was beginning to enjoy the thought of meeting Alice. Though his eyes still glistened, he was calm enough to think of lighting a cigarette and of making civil answers to Mr. Worthing's silly sayings.

'Was there ever such a hot day in May? The farmers ought to like it. 'Member that story of the man who had the power of making rain? He couldn't please everybody. Terrible waste of time, those fairy-stories. The people tore him to pieces, because some wanted fine weather and some wanted wet.'

'The Bishop's party wanted fine weather and Dr. Potts wanted wet,' said Brandon.

Mr. Worthing laughed, as soon as he saw it was a joke.

'Well, I'd rather be in real life than in fairy-stories. We don't get torn to pieces nowadays. Besides, we're getting on well enough—well enough now. By the way,

Lord Charles, I don't want to worry you, and more especially when it's all coming right, but I'd be careful what I said about the Empire, you know, and the war. You've said some dangerous things in your time, they tell me. Well, who hasn't? We all say dangerous things now and then—I've done it myself—but we mustn't offend any of our friends just now. I'll give you a little list of those who've been at me about militarism and all that. We'll bring them along with us all right, never you fear, but you might remember who they are. You can give them a hearty word when you meet them, and talk about retrenchment. And when you meet the other lot, you can just say Rosebery's your man—not too loud, of course, but just a something.'

Brandon promised to say nothing too loud. He knew that the danger was lest the Bishop should overhear him. He felt lonely then, missing the sound of the people's voices.

## CHAPTER XI

AFTER the return of Brandon there passed four weeks in which events moved on towards the blazing catastrophe that was to shake the foundations of Cayle, and be reflected even in the gossip of the House of Commons and the newspaper placards of the Strand. The time that intervened, as is usual when electioneering is afoot, was filled with things more important in quantity than quality. Agents and workers sped from house to house, from argument to argument, and the health of Sir Benjamin Mason went from bad to worse. Willoughby dined somewhere every night, compelling reverence. St. Agnes was untiring in the smoking-concert kind of work; even his father's recent death did not affect his performance of these duties. That event, which left him richer by some £40,000 a year, did something incidentally to stimulate political activity; for, when it was murmured that St. Agnes in decency should retire from the contest into mourning, the cleverness of Willoughby drew a distinction between public duties and private obligations, and he vehemently applauded the spirit of St. Agnes in performing the former at the expense of the latter. Thenceforth public spirit took its place among the household gods that were brought in on every afternoon tea-tray in Cayle. Willoughby had created a new deity. It was Public Spirit as by him expounded that made Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet continue her work for the Primrose League in face of domestic trouble caused by an acute affair between the butler and the cook. Both she and Mrs. Russell fell into serious arrears with their work for the Guild of Women's Needlework. What was perhaps of less importance to the cause was that the speeches of

Willoughby were unquestionably good. His father, summing up the situation, expressed the general opinion by saying that every man with a coat to his back would vote for the Unionist candidate. It is by such assertions that public opinion is created. They are justified because they realize their own truth. Dr. Potts told a Liberal meeting, by way of reply, that the people's friend would get the people's votes, and each of these catch phrases was effective positively and negatively. Those who scorned to rank themselves among the people were confirmed by Dr. Potts in their loyalty to Willoughby, while all who knew they had no 'coats to their backs' were logically driven to the other side. So every day the situation became more rigid; there was every prospect of the election being a battle of the classes. In this there was nothing but what was acceptable to Willoughby, who held to the principle that votes are important less in their actual number than in the moral weight they carry. This was an opinion, and the difficulty about opinions is that often, when put into words, they appear so ludicrously stupid. That is why plain language must be clothed in verbiage, for opinions, like those who hold them, are not decent without their garments, or at least a bit of rag draped round the more obvious fallacy. In plain truth, the entourage of Willoughby, though eager to win, preferred the adherence of one substantial tradesman to the votes of half a dozen labouring men. It could not be nakedly expressed, but there was no harm in saying that votes should be weighed and not counted. That puts the opinion into a neat costume, and it will be found the cause of a great deal that afterwards happened in Cayle.

But some of the Unionists were bold enough to strip the opinion naked. St. Agnes, an employer of labour in other places as populous as Cayle, had long appreciated the value of mere numbers. He was frightened by the prospect of a fight between the classes. To him it seemed that the memorable events of the day of Brandon's entrance were big with danger, with warning, and he could not comfortably await the result of a solid working-

class vote in favour of the Liberal. He thought, moreover, that there was no law of Nature to bring this calamity to pass. The lower classes are no more Liberal than Conservative. Their attitude in Cayle he conceived to be purely accidental, the outcome of a difference of method between one candidate and the other. Consequently, he made up his mind to go to Willoughby and see if he could not induce him to do more in the way of courting popular support.

One morning, with this object, he sacrificed his daily ride and went to Mowis Court. He met young Cooper on his way, who wondered at the remarkable warmth of the greeting he received. He was asked to go and help at the interview with Willoughby, and he understood with some enjoyment that St. Agnes was a little bit afraid to go alone.

It was characteristic of those days that, though their business was with Willoughby, they had not walked far before they were talking of Brandon. St. Agnes wished it had been he that they had to deal with.

'He is so much more reasonable than Willoughby. He is a practical politician; there's no nonsense about him. Willoughby is such a terrible idealist.'

Cooper answered with a slightly mocking laugh.

'Ideals are funny things. But tell me about Brandon. Is he all right?'

'If you mean in health, I do not think he is all right at all,' St. Agnes answered. 'He is wearied out. He looks pale and bored. But, of course, his game is going famously, worse luck.'

'Do you see much of him now?' asked Cooper.

St. Agnes did not. If he went to Vitryfield he felt rather like a spy. He put his arm in Cooper's, requiring some outlet for an emotion which he knew his words would inadequately express.

'They're awfully nice people, Cooper,' he said. 'They know I'm working against them every day, but when I meet them they are just as friendly as ever.'

His tone demanded sympathy, and Cooper was intellectually so unscrupulous that he did not hesitate to use

a platitude when it met his needs. He commented on the virtues of friendly warfare as taught in the playing-fields of public schools.

'Charley is so large-minded,' said St. Agnes, thoroughly at his ease in such a subject. 'My being an opponent does not prevent his treating me in as friendly a way as ever.'

'Any more than your being a friend would prevent his ordering your execution, if it suited him,' said Cooper.

'My dear fellow——'

'He is a practical politician, as you told me,' said Cooper. 'There is no nonsense about him.'

What puzzled St. Agnes was that Cooper could think thus and still admire Brandon.

It is rather incongruous to make small bets with millionaires, but Cooper offered ten to one in sixpences on the surrender of Willoughby's ideals to the practical arguments of St. Agnes. He lost the bet.

St. Agnes explained his views with the business-like lucidity he had inherited with his gold, and Willoughby listened with such patience as his education had secured him. When tried beyond endurance, he stood still by the fireplace and delivered the inevitable oration.

'You would have me a demagogue, a second Brandon,' he began.

That was a singularly comprehensive criticism, for it demolished St. Agnes's proposals by showing at once their actual impossibility and their intrinsic hatefulness. It was followed by a cannonade of some minutes' duration. Then St. Agnes, rushing in at a pause, was unwise enough to use the very comparison with which Willoughby had wrecked his arguments at the first.

'It's all very well to run down Brandon,' he said, 'but you might do worse than imitate him in some things. He has some supporters whom he doesn't love any more than you love the trades-unions. He has got the temperance fellows, and the Nonconformists, and that lot. I don't suppose they suit his taste exactly, but I'm told they can't say enough for him now. He has nobbled them, fads and all.'

Willoughby spread out his hands to an imaginary fire behind him.

'I'm not acquainted with Brandon's principles,' he said, 'nor am I aware that he possesses any, so I cannot criticise his conduct in making these alliances. For myself, I am in the position of a guardian of society, and I shall not compromise myself with howling mobs or scheming demagogues. I would rather lose the seat than betray my trust.'

A little later, when the heavy guns had battered the enthusiasm of St. Agnes, and made him sore and sulky, he tried to suggest that Willoughby should make some concession to the views of friends who were working hard to help him.

'God forbid that any man should work for me!' said Willoughby. 'I thought we were all working for the cause.'

It happened that Cooper from a shop-window had seen the hand of the Liberal leader placed in greeting on the shoulder of his lieutenant Dusky, and had noted its effect on the face of the boy. He meditated on the advantage held by those who have no cause to work for, no principles to serve, but fight the battle for their own ends. The snub was as effective with St. Agnes as the caress had been with Dusky. He was very much annoyed. There was a pause, relieved by one of Cooper's gentle common-places.

'Surely our first duty is to win the seat.'

The remark was not worth answering, and Willoughby began to sum up the discussion.

'Those who sell their votes for flattery will go against me, anyhow, and those who vote on principle will support me whether I flatter them or not. It is their votes that I want.'

'I told you his damned morals would be too much for us,' said St. Agnes, as they walked home. 'That fellow is always thinking of morality, and can't be induced to talk sense.'

'You are too severe,' Cooper answered. 'Let us say he has put his money on morality and refuses to hedge.'

It was the first time St. Agnes had spoken disrespectfully of morality. But many new things happen at times of crisis. In his trouble he went to the Dean, who was an expert operator for the removal of tumours from the conscience. The Dean said he would talk to Willoughby, but gave little hope of success.

'To be frank with you, I don't believe we can do any good now ; it is too late. Charley Brandon seems to have completely captured the labouring classes, and Willoughby is scarcely the man to compete with him in that line. I'm not at all sure that Willoughby is not right in playing entirely to the upper and middle classes. At any rate, it's a piece of daring sportsmanship.'

St. Agnes stared to hear such a term applied to what he considered either cowardice or stupidity. He began to see that the Dean shared Cooper's view of Willoughby.

'Shall we win, Mr. Dean ?' he asked.

'I doubt it. Willoughby is playing a brilliant game, but I am afraid he will be borne down. It is really very hard when you consider what a united party we are, and how our opponents have done nothing until now but dispute among themselves. What I fear is that Charley and his lower-class vote will be too much for us. It is the man, not the Liberals, we have to fear.'

St. Agnes began to forget his troubles and his party.

'They've done well, Charley and Alice, haven't they ?' he said. 'It's a good deal to have brought all sections of the Liberals into line.'

With his long mouth broadening into a smile, the Dean described how he had been at Vitryfield when the Romanist Irish priest met a Liberal Leaguer on the doorstep.

'Charley kept the priest in the library and Alice took the other round the garden. You can guess the rest.'

St. Agnes could guess, having some knowledge of the way they did their business at Vitryfield.

'And the two men are now on speaking terms ?' he asked.

'Hardly that,' the Dean replied ; 'but, what is more important, Vitryfield is on speaking terms with both.'

St. Agnes laughed rather sadly.

'Poor Alice! I wonder how she likes it?'

'Poor Charley!' said the Dean. 'He was happier in the days when he could fly in the face of every prejudice with impunity. He is not happy now.'

Indeed, the days to which the Dean alluded were happier for everyone. St. Agnes could then ride daily with Brandon, talking of sport and the price of coal, and could drop in at Vitryfield three times a week. Cooper could then mention Brandon's name at home without meeting reproof from parents and sisters. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet had not had the pain of estrangement from the children of the poor sweet Marchioness. Greater evils than these, however, entered Cayle on the day of Brandon's procession. Charitable work among the poor, so large a part of the daily life of the town, fell off, and experts knew it was not wholly due to the pressure of political duties. There was, in fact, a growing hostility between the classes. There were rumours of strikes, the Unionist cause in danger. That these and other things had come to Cayle was the result, sadly and bitterly resented by those who understood it, of the pride, the ambition, the vengeful spirit, of one man.

For the citizens of Cayle, whether they viewed him from the mount of blessing or the mount of cursing, were dazzled by the personality of Brandon. He had become to them as a Gladstone or a Chamberlain, men whose force has been such that they have made their opponents think black white by merely asserting that, in their opinion, it was black. It might be said of Cayle that the whole town thought in terms of Brandon. He was like Eve's apple, giving men knowledge of good and evil. The affair of the improper play at the Theatre Royal was an instance. Far back in the past Lord Wight had performed a moral washing of his habits, not unneeded, and thereupon had starched them to a degree of stiffness that nothing had since bent or softened. His attitude made it necessary for Brandon to take a Puritanic line against the theatre, and so a political meeting was fixed for the night of the performance. Privately, with Dr. Potts, it

was settled that Alice should appear at the theatre to please the other faction, while the meeting was to be for working men only. The other class could go to the theatre if they liked. This compromise had the remarkable distinction of pleasing both sides and only cheating one. The next step was for Lord Wight and the Bishop to put their heads together and despatch the Dean as an emissary to ask Willoughby, in aid of the cause of morality, to hold a Conservative meeting the same night, and so complete the ruin of the notorious Mrs. Darbyshire's appearance at the theatre. Willoughby was much interested.

'There seems no doubt,' said the Dean, 'that the play with that woman acting in it is quite beyond the pale. People are very angry with the proprietor about it. We shall lose nothing by setting our faces against it, and it will keep up our reputation.'

Willoughby said it was not a question of profit and loss. It was a matter of principle, above expediency. No time should be lost in making arrangements for the meeting. Then followed the inevitable comment :

'I suppose Brandon will be a prominent spectator at the performance ?'

'I think not,' the Dean replied. 'Like us, he will be engaged at a political meeting. Indeed, the action we propose to take in defence of decency is only an imitation of what he has already resolved to do.'

Willoughby's face showed plainly what he thought of Brandon as defender of decency, with himself as a humble imitator. He started to pace the room in meditation, his fine brain straining at its work.

The Dean thought fit to fulfil his promise to St. Agnes by mentioning the matter of the working-class vote, but his advice was given half-heartedly. For some moments Willoughby's mind was engaged with other things ; then, on the hearthrug he came back to practical business, and diffused such an atmosphere of righteousness that you would never have noticed, in the thickness of it, the Dean's black cloth and gaiters. The Dean had never really believed in the cause he came to advocate.

'I think you are right,' he said. 'It may be best for you to stick to your guns, to take care of the susceptibilities of your supporters, and not hunt for votes among those who mean to oppose you in any event.'

'Exactly what I told St. Agnes,' Willoughby exclaimed. 'Those who vote on principle will support me, and those who sell their votes for flattery will go against me, anyhow. But he thought proper to be annoyed with me.'

The Dean believed it possible that St. Agnes's annoyance was caused as much by the phraseology as by the doctrine. He himself felt more amusement than annoyance.

'But, of course,' he said presently, 'one can't shut one's eyes to the value of popularity.'

It was Willoughby's chance for a retort. A withering glance prepared the way for it.

'For my part, I prefer reputation to popularity.'

The Dean, quite unruffled, meditated for a moment.

'I suppose,' he said, looking out of the window, 'popularity is when people like you, and reputation is when they ought to, but really can't.'

'It is not for one of my years to argue such points with you,' said Willoughby. 'I may not know the difference between reputation and popularity, but I hope I know the difference between right and wrong, and that is enough for me.'

No one looking at him then could have doubted that this knowledge would be sufficient to guide him through all crises, moral and material, to secure him a place of honour in the next world after a not unprofitable journey through this.

'I think we will abandon the idea of holding that meeting,' he remarked, his eyes raised to the ceiling.

The Dean looked at him in surprise.

'You can tell the Bishop that I trust none of my supporters would go to that play in any case, so interference from me would be quite superfluous.'

He said this in a manner unwontedly constrained. Then his spirits rose, and he met the Dean's glance.

'In fact, it would be an insult, a piece of impertinence

of which I hope I am incapable. My supporters are persons of respectability, whom it would be unworthy to doubt. I will have nothing to do with the matter.'

'Charley Brandon will make a little moral capital out of it,' said the Dean. 'I don't see why you should not go in and take your share.'

It was his expectation that the phrase 'moral capital' would provoke a retort whose vehemence would be in proportion to the truth of the insinuation it conveyed.

'I shall take some public opportunity of explaining my attitude in the matter,' said Willoughby; and the Dean was immediately relieved of his fear lest any moral capital should be lost.

'Brandon takes one course, and I take another,' Willoughby added.

But he did not say if this was a criticism of the particular situation or an enunciation of the general principle. The Dean assumed it to be the latter, and smiled as he rose to take his leave.

'Moreover, I will not have it said that I stole his ideas.'

'That might do you harm.'

'It would certainly degrade our cause.'

Walking home the Dean thought rather mournfully of Willoughby. There are many reasons why men fail, and sometimes the reason is that, though they can lie cleverly, they cannot tell the truth. Willoughby had courage and adroitness, but he lost the regard of the Dean because he would not lay aside his breastplate of righteousness even in the presence of his allies. The implied lack of confidence must necessarily blight friendship.

He opened his heart to Cooper, whom he met.

'Willoughby will never be great,' he said, 'because he'll never have any friends worth having; and Brandon won't be great, because, though he will have plenty of friends, he'll always have too many enemies. Our two choicest vessels have leaks.'

After this it became an opinion among the Conservative leaders that the sooner the contest occurred the better they would fare. Names were not mentioned, but

suspicion breathed that somewhere perhaps the wheels of party energy might clog. It is hard to sever the cause from the man who represents it.

Nevertheless, another view was taken by some who had news from the Liberal camp. They said that every day was a gain, for if time brought chilliness to one side, it would bring an earthquake to the other. The surface of Liberal unity was too hollow to remain.

'Same old story,' said Sir Benjamin Mason from the couch of retirement where he sat waiting for his peerage — 'a battle between party principles and personal animosities.'

'We should be nearer to scientific accuracy,' was the Dean's comment, 'if we called it a contest of endurance between the patience of Brandon and the patience of Willoughby's supporters.'

## CHAPTER XII

OF all the abominable forms of democratic government, there is surely none so bad as government by by-elections. A General Election frightens the country into something like a serious mood, but not so a by-election. Some miserable borough, while seeking its father's asses, finds itself suddenly the focus of all eyes, and hears that the fate of the Empire hangs on its decision. Every species of political crank has leisure to pay it a visit. It is canvassed and recanvassed. From distant cities Ministers and ex-Ministers call out to it to do its duty. It is to be judge of the sins and virtues of the Government, of the recent increase of the tax on tea, of the truth of Christianity, and every other burning question of the hour. Then, on the polling day, as likely as not, it votes for old Sir X, who is a very good fellow, after all, or young Lord Y, who fought at the war and is his father's son. Immediately the thunder of its voice sounds through the land. Government, Opposition, press, nation, tremble with joy or fear. The cranks and fanatics, those on the winning side, strike the stars with their uplifted hands. The new member walks into the House as a herald of Fate, and actually the policy of a great country is influenced by what was in the borough itself, if not a personal compliment, something between a coquettish simper and a clownish joke.

This was the function about to be exercised by the borough of Cayle, where the indecision of Sir Benjamin Mason prolonged the agony of crisis. Thither, of course, went every monomania, craze, and foible that could find a head to lodge in. And on their arrival, what did they do? Society in Cayle did not love fanatics. Among its

many faults there was not that one. It was therefore open to Willoughby, the guardian of society, to treat them cavalierly. They came along, poor pedlars, each with his small pack of votes upon his back, to sell to the highest bidder; but Willoughby would not even make an offer, so they went over the way and sold their wares for Brandon's notes of hand. The enfranchisement of women, for instance, was admitted to his programme.

Much of this bargaining was done by letter; a good deal more was personally negotiated in a room above a shop in Market Square. This was called the 'Liberal Agent's Office.' It was the headquarters of an informal committee of party leaders, organized as the model and foundation of the election committee which would be called into being hereafter. Mr. Worthing was the parent of this committee. He boasted about it—its efficiency, its representative character, its enthusiasm. Most of all did he boast, though only to Brandon, and in softest whispers, that owing to his own adroitness its members had never yet met in a room together. With great prudence they were summoned by twos and threes on an evening to the agent's office, where there was always either Potts or Worthing in attendance.

One evening Mr. Worthing sat alone, busied with letters, in this office. He wrote several hasty notes of the kind he knew so well: 'Will put it before Lord Charles, who is naturally extremely busy just at present. Shall not see him for a day or two, but am certain I shall make it right with him. Please come and see me here to-morrow.' Then he took from his pocket a communication that was far more delicate. He was an emotional man. Moisture was so near the surface of him that at the least intellectual effort of a non-professional kind it stood out in great pathetic beads all over his fat face. This was strange in one so optimistic.

While he painfully read and reread the letter in his hands he was joined by Dr. Potts. Dr. Potts was angry. He laid down his umbrella on the table, then his hat, rather noisily, and opened fire on Mr. Worthing. He had

a grievance against the candidate. The next night being the date fixed for a meeting in the Wesleyan schools, a certain reverend minister proposed to ask if Brandon would press the Government for the release of the convict Lynch. Dr. Potts had informed Brandon, who had answered rudely.

Mr. Worthing sucked the end of his pen.

'Never you mind,' he said. 'He'll give the right answer when the time comes.'

'The subject seems to madden him,' Dr. Potts exclaimed.

'Lots of these subjects seem to madden him,' said Mr. Worthing; 'but he's all right when it comes to the point in public. You wait.'

He fumbled with the letter, turning it round and round in his hands.

'Because he's a blooming lord he thinks he can answer me with "damns" and insults,' said Dr. Potts.

But Mr. Worthing explained that he himself had sometimes been thus treated, so there was no cause for Dr. Potts to complain. Brandon's ill-temper was due to nothing but the weather. Then he threw the letter across, and leant back in his chair.

The letter was from Brandon. It dealt with the morrow's speech, in which the candidate proposed to say that retrenchment, though necessary, must not be at the expense of the Navy or the Army, while Mr. Chamberlain's proposals ought not to be condemned unless they were found to be dangerous to the interests of the working classes.

It might have been St. Agnes and the Dean discussing Willoughby.

'Of course he's right to play to the chaps in the gallery,' said Dr. Potts.

But Mr. Worthing was not sure they had not had enough of that already.

'But it's been his line all along.'

'To-morrow won't be a gallery night. It'll be all shopkeepers—quite a small meeting.'

'Question is,' said Dr. Potts, 'if it's worth while

playing jingo even to the gallery. He hasn't tried it on yet; stuck to socialism so far.'

Mr. Worthing suggested that a jingo speech might give great offence to the middle-class voter, more even than the socialism.

'It's always been my line,' said Dr. Potts, 'to plump on the working men and snap your fingers at the churchy lot. Question is if the jingo business would go down with the workmen.'

This question he discussed, but could not answer. From Mr. Worthing he had very little help except in the stimulating presence of a brow that oozed with the results of mental struggles more obvious than intelligible. The fact was that Mr. Worthing thought about a different aspect of the matter. He shook his head a great deal and heaved many sighs. At last, speaking painfully, he laid his hand on the chirpy self-questioning of Dr. Potts.

'I'm not happy about this business, Potts,' he said.

'Why? What's up? What else is there?' Dr. Potts inquired, answering not so much the speaker's words as the anxiety of his tone.

'I've seen candidates of all sorts, Potts, and in all my experience I've never met one like this one. He's not like the ordinary Liberal candidate. He is—well, my wife says he's flighty. Now, I'm not flighty, and I don't understand it.'

'He's pretty insolent,' Dr. Potts replied; 'I know that. I don't know about flightiness, but he seems to have kept sober enough since he came back.'

'This business about Lynch,' Mr. Worthing continued, in meditative tones. 'Of course he'll answer the question very properly when the time comes, but what does he want to go fashing himself about it for? It's odd—it's very odd.'

'It's temper,' said Dr. Potts.

'It may be his nerves and the weather, certainly it may. I have heard that the hot weather is bad for nerves. I know it myself. But, then, why does he want to write me that letter? It's all very mysterious.'

Mr. Worthing sucked his pen. Dr. Potts talked at

random. There was a linguistic agility about the talk of Dr. Potts which stirred the envy of the older man. Thoughts were simmering in his mind, but his tongue was unwieldy.

'He's been round to Jones, and Harper, and Rawlinson,' he said, falling back on facts, 'and he talks to them. It's funny. I don't understand it.'

This provoked a string of jeering questions. Why should not Brandon go and talk to his supporters? Mr. Worthing battled with his answers.

'You see, it's not ordinary stuff he talks. It's funny; it's—it's funny.' He struggled for a word. Had he been acquainted with the ancient and private history of Vitryfield, he would have said that it was a new series of Brandon's pranks. He was not so well equipped, however, and he could only add, 'It's like that letter—sort of dreamy stuff.'

To Dr. Potts the candidate had always seemed to represent the acme of electioneering smartness. On these grounds he defended him. Mr. Worthing conceded that it was right enough when Brandon was on his legs at a meeting or answering a letter. It was in private talk that he was puzzling. But all these refinements were beyond the scope of Dr. Potts's understanding. His policy was simple. Brandon dreamy or Brandon practical was going to win them the first Liberal victory they had ever known in Cayle, and after that, if he made a fool of himself, they would chuck him over. He would have served his purpose, and the Conservative domination would be smashed.

But none of this was palatable to Mr. Worthing. Personal affection hampered him, and his loyalty to the great family.

'I must answer that letter,' he said; and the sweat broke out afresh.

What he wrote he read aloud. It was not a long letter, but half an hour passed before the signature was reached.

'My dear Lord Charles.'

After all, it was mostly nerves and the weather.

Brandon must not be rebuked, but comforted. He had always been a nervous boy. The hard work was too much for him. It accounted for his irritability and moroseness.

There was a paragraph of sympathy. Then came the necessary references to the Fiscal question.

'Tell him it won't pay,' said Dr. Potts.

'Better give him some reason,' Mr. Worthing thought.

'Taxing the food of the working classes?'

Mr. Worthing shook his head. He knew that Brandon had his own notions of what pleased and displeased the working classes. It was his province.

'Contrary to Liberal principles,' Dr. Potts suggested.

'Dear me, no—not that,' said Mr. Worthing. He had already burnt his fingers in that sort of argument. But it suggested something better. 'I'll say that many people *might call* it contrary to Liberal principles.'

After that there came a paragraph which threw cold water on the proposed references to the navy and the army. It ended thus :

'Cayle is a long way from the sea, and people here are not much interested in naval matters.'

Lastly, there was an appeal for a favourable answer to the question concerning the release of Lynch. Lynch had only done what he thought right, and why should a man be punished for doing that?

When the envelope was closed Mr. Worthing remarked that everything would turn out all right in the end.

The course of this letter must be followed. It passed through the hands of that enterprising branch of the public service whose members were even then, an organized body, demanding from both candidates a promised rise of wages. By them it was delivered at the doors of Vitryfield. It was placed with half a dozen others, and carried to Brandon's room, where, lying on a table laid for breakfast, it awaited the end of his long sleep in the adjoining bedroom.

The irony of fate enhanced its merit, for it lay on the top of a friendly note from Claude Venning, who asked, half in mirth and half in sorrow, how Cayle was

bearing itself beneath the blows of the avenger. And was the vengeance sweet? Was it nearly completed?

Here were two letters from persons interested in the attitude of Brandon. Their peculiarity was in the circumstance that he might have answered both by sending to each writer the letter of the other.

The next thing to befall them was a glance of sadness cast on them by Alice. She came to sit in her brother's room, and she knew that in those days letters were one of his main causes of depression. She sat by the window, reading a local newspaper.

At last came Brandon in a light dressing-gown, very fresh from bed. His hair lay like tall grass beaten by the rain. With a smile and a raising of his eyebrows he contrived to bring off a very creditable brotherly greeting, making Alice welcome, but not costing the trouble of a single word. Then, ringing for breakfast, he turned wearily to the letters.

Alice had no need to watch him as he read. His anger and bitterness were to be felt in the atmosphere. Besides, there was something audible below his breath, whose meaning was as clear as its wording was happily indistinct. He gave her the letters to read, and walked about the room in the usual state of irritation, his face twitching.

They brought his breakfast. Fortunately, it was not possible for either the folly of fools or the hollowness of revenge to mar the pleasure of the first cup of tea in the morning. He sat down to it, and was soothed.

'Mr. Venning seems to think,' said Alice, 'that you are standing simply to annoy the Cayle people.'

'And Worthing's letter,' Brandon answered, 'shows how admirably I've succeeded in my endeavours. Read it.'

Alice did so, amid Brandon's running comments. It struck her as being a very sensible letter.

'My dearest, you really mustn't swear when I am in your room—not even with your eyes. I think Mr. Worthing is quite right in what he says. You are always on the verge of an indiscretion, you know. You

think too much about what is picturesque and too little about what is safe.'

'I'm sick of politics,' he said.

There are some people whose words are intended to convey the literal meaning which the dictionary assigns them; others at times speak rather to indicate a frame of mind: the listener must be a dictionary to himself. It was well known to Alice that Brandon was not really sick of politics, and yet she answered him with yearning in her voice.

'Oh, Charley, you mustn't be.'

'They've tied me hand and foot,' he said in sudden fury. 'Ever since the campaign began what have I done but jog along like an old cow, with the whole crew of them prodding me this way and that? I'm sick of it.'

'But when you are once elected——'

'It will be no different. Do you suppose I shall be free in the House? And what about the next election?'

'I thought you were a fighting man,' she said, reproaching him.

'I draw a distinction between fighting and being bullied,' he replied. 'Look at it! When I was small they bullied my body, and now I'm big they bully my mind. Don't you see? I'm never free of them.'

'And who are they?'

'My enemies,' he answered simply.

She read through Worthing's letter again.

'It's a civil letter,' she said; 'in fact, it's a kindly, sympathetic letter.'

'But, Alice, don't you see it's folly?'

She suspected that she was talking not to the practical politician, but to the bookworm, and so, doubtfully, she answered:

'Yes. But you can't call it bullying when it is only kindly folly, and all in your own interest.'

'Bullying is an old man of the sea!' he said. 'Yesterday it was wanton hostility; to-day it is well-meaning folly.'

If folly be declared a form of bullying, it was clear to Alice that her brother was again the man of books. She stood by him and smoothed his hair.

'You must forget that you were ever a boy,' she said. 'You must not let bullying become an *idée fixe*. Try for more self-control, and be your own master.'

'I would rather be other people's,' said he.

The sullen cloud had overspread his face, and Alice knew that she had no art to conjure it away. She proceeded to do her business.

'I do not want to worry you with details,' she told him; 'I only want a general direction. The fact is, the Bishop will have to help us to break down a great deal of clerical hostility. Someone will have to go and ask him. Shall we send father or Mr. Worthing?'

'I'll go myself,' said Brandon.

'You mustn't.'

'I will.'

'It is madness! It will ruin you.'

'Madness has ruined me half a dozen times already. I shall go.'

'You won't, when it comes to the point,' said she.

Her words were just what would have risen to the lips of Mr. Worthing, but whereas he would have been wise and kept them unspoken, Alice was angry enough to blurt them out.

So they parted, and Brandon spent the morning in the garden, doing nothing. He appeared at luncheon for ten minutes. He answered his letters, and rode out to the hills. He made some political visits in the evening, and spent an hour at the Liberal Club, after dining at the Royal Hotel. That was a day typical of the times. But Alice noticed that the periods of surly idleness grew longer, the hours of business shorter and less frequent.

## CHAPTER XIII

THOSE who have had the happiness of being present at a bull-fight will be able to appreciate the emotions of Liberals on the day when Brandon went to see the Bishop. They saw the infuriated beast put down his head and charge for the arena, the deft toreador approaching coolly by another way. But, alas! the fight was conducted *in camera*. The public had to wait in dire suspense outside the doors, uncertain whose corpse they would be called upon to bear away. This was the literal truth, as far as Mr. Worthing was concerned, for he paced about the road outside the palace, ready with all manner of soothing arguments and excuses by which to render first aid to the outraged, or perhaps the apoplectic. Prayers and tears had not availed to avert this encounter. All that could be done, and was done, was to blunt the steel of the one and the horns of the other by means of wisely pacific exhortations. Brandon was represented to the Bishop as a character at a critical stage of reformation, where harsh words might cause a relapse. Similarly, to Brandon they said the Bishop was his bread and butter; let him not quarrel. Above all, they begged him to conceal the red flag of socialism, a colour supposed to be distasteful to the bull, feared also as the one flaw in the candidate's acknowledged prudence.

The interview took place in the Bishop's library, between the hours of tea and dinner. It might well be asked why Brandon, having studiously kept clear of everybody's prejudices, should now desire to deal a thumping blow at the chief prejudice of his most prominent supporter by presenting himself in flesh and

blood before him. For him to meet the Bishop was to madden him. Others were quite ready to get him what he went to ask—the clerical influence—and others would stand a much better chance. But the youth of many motives was immovable. They begged him to desist, foretelling bloodshed, and defeated their purpose by rousing his sense of the dramatic. That was a second motive for going. They tried again, and he would not hear them. Another whim was impelling him—a great curiosity to hear from the mouth of the oracle itself what manner of language was used on the Liberal Olympus. He was wearied with the pettiness of mortals.

Conversation, like life, attains the highest interest only when it is inspired by love or war. That of Brandon and the Bishop never reached this pitch. For three minutes they talked about the remarkable warmth of the weather, and by the end of that time each knew that there was no chance of a fight between them, nor the remotest possibility of love. Let us beware of decrying those preliminary observations on the weather. Many times they have set the tone for the whole of a critical talk to follow. They give time for each party to measure the strength of the other. Brandon and the Bishop, by the engineering of both, had avoided each other's presence during several years, and they needed to correct some false impressions. The weather made their opportunity. The Bishop had been thought to be a ranting politician in a perpetual passion, using Hebraic curses from a conscientious objection to more modern swear words. Brandon, on the other hand, had appeared to the ex-headmaster as a bad and noisy boy whom he had never had the chance of flogging. Each of them regarded the other rather as a type than as a person. But no man can be properly understood till one has, at least, heard him talk about the weather.

The process was like this :

BRANDON. 'How do you do?' ('You are a bigger man than I thought you were.')

THE BISHOP. 'How hot it has been lately!' ('I didn't know you'd be able to meet my eye like this.')

Bishop explained his intentions with regard to the future. While he meant, for the present, to help Brandon unreservedly, he said he should try to find a more desirable candidate for the next election. But the immediate object was to capture the seat from the Tories.

'And I am to be used as the tool,' Brandon said.

'Precisely,' the Bishop answered; 'though I think you will agree that it is more to please the tool than to please the carpenter. You are not exactly a tool of my choosing.'

That was a fair hit, fully enjoyed by Brandon.

'You see,' the Bishop continued, 'I have known many men like you. You are not going to be great. You will be brilliant at first, but you will fail because men will not respect you. So I shall not feel that I am wrecking a fine career.'

So saying, he felt something of the joy of wielding the rod, but Brandon did not wish to discuss himself, and was silent.

'You do not agree,' the Bishop added. 'How should you? You do not know the world. You are in many ways so very young; and, like most young men of these days, you think your elders are necessarily weak and foolish.'

Brandon took his words in the personal sense in which they were meant, and replied:

'Oh no; really, I don't. I think you are a very clever man, and a very strong man. What you lack is education.'

In the way of insolence that remark, followed by a gaze of placid eyes at the petrified face of the Bishop, was the masterpiece of the conversation. It was a remark which the Bishop did not repeat to anyone. Perhaps he was ashamed of having kept his anger in control at a time when propriety demanded the offender's expulsion from the room. The behaviour of the Bishop's temper, indeed, through the whole of this interview was highly compromising. Anger was part of the episcopal stock-in-trade. It would never have done for the world to learn how it could be controlled at times; only the

Dean knew that—the cynical Dean—who on far less solid grounds suspected that even the rectitude of Willoughby was incidentally the heading of a long column of receipts in the cash account-book of its owner. And, after all, there is no reason why a man should not make some use of the virtues God has given him. Had there been a single listener present the Bishop would have answered in language worthy of an exasperated archangel, fearful and holy; but as it was he could yield to the same temptation as was assailing Brandon—a mastering interest in what each hoped to learn of the mind of the other.

By easy steps they passed from bickering to politics, inverting the usual order. Their personal fencing had made light comedy; their political dialogue fashioned local history. To the historian, whether of Brandon or of Cayle, it is momentous; for it did more than even the cautious letters of Mr. Worthing to bring about the convulsion to which the stars in their courses were progressing. They talked, the Bishop and Brandon, in the same dialect. Each, through the din of words, could hear the true meaning that sounded from the mind of the other. With them it was not, as so often happens in conversations where men argue perhaps about the price of carbon, whether it be cheap or dear, till, after an hour of strife, contradictions, anger, and scorn, they find that one meant carbon in the form of diamonds, while the other was thinking all the time of coal. Brandon and the Bishop were not thus handicapped. Understanding each other's language, they climbed up rapidly through the brushwood that grew around the preliminaries of their talk, and soon stood clear, each of them, on the pinnacles of ultimate principle.

It began when the Bishop inquired for the progress of the campaign. Brandon groaned about the pettiness of his supporters. He described the letters from faddists, the interviews with fanatical devotees of unimportant causes. The Bishop's sympathy was with him. He, too, had chafed at the jarring of the cranky wheels that stop the great machine from working.

'They are good men,' he said, 'and we respect them—the temperance reformers, the Free Churchmen, the seekers after universal peace—but they have not the statesmanship to make them temporarily lay aside their own ideals and concentrate on some one portion of the programme. If they would do that, we could achieve everything in time. All their ideals are right, but their own splendid enthusiasm defeats their objects.'

It did not occur to the Bishop that the man who can temporarily surrender his ideal in order to work for someone else's is not the man who embraces the particular ideals he mentioned. He was himself a rare exception.

For some time, and with many illustrations, the petulant anger of Brandon and the sorrowful wrath of the Bishop were poured on those unaccommodating idealists who stood in the path of them both. Then came the charitable after-thought:

'In one's graver moments, after all, one cannot but admire them for refusing to stain their hands with party manoeuvring.'

'The political moralist is always mean,' Brandon replied. 'He expects others to do the card-sharping, so that he can rake in the winnings.'

From talking of the virtues and vices of faddists they came naturally to discuss the great ideal of Liberalism itself.

'I believe,' said Brandon, 'that there are not more than five hundred men of intelligence to-day who can really be called Liberals. I am not a Liberal, nor are you, my lord. My father is one.'

At this stage also they were agreed. The Bishop began to understand what Brandon had meant when he said that candour was a luxury. He had little thought to hear himself acknowledged he was not a Liberal.

'You believe in local veto,' Brandon continued; 'I believe in State education. Those are both utterly opposed to Liberal principles. One is a kind of domestic socialism, and the other is national socialism. The truth is that Liberalism is the creed of a very few; it can never

be the creed of a democracy. They could never understand it, and they'd detest it if they could.'

Thus lightly, like an old shoe, these two opponents of the Government cast off the great individualist doctrine of Cobden and Mill that dominated the British ruling class for half a century.

'It was Mr. Gladstone who smashed Liberalism,' said Brandon, 'when he brought in political morality instead of it; and it was Gladstone who first appealed to the people, the natural corollary to the end of Liberalism.'

The Bishop agreed that Mr. Gladstone was too great a man to be a Liberal.

'But you are wrong in saying that I approve of local veto. I don't. I wish for total prohibition.'

'Then you are even less of a Liberal than I thought you.'

'Certainly,' the Bishop said. 'You suspected me of provincialism, but you were unjust. I abominate provincialism and small local authorities, because of the perils they introduce. I desire to see a mighty national Government. To that Government I should look to enforce prohibition, and many other great ideals. I am certainly not a provincialist.'

Brandon considered that remark with the greatest interest. He blew a long smoke-shaft through his nostrils and watched its gradual dissipation.

'My lord,' he said, 'if there was an unobservant listener here, who had never seen me drunk or heard you preaching, he might say the time for us to part would not come as soon as the next election.'

Still they were agreed. The cursed heresy of provincialism, against which was directed the statesmanship of the Norman Kings, the genius of the Tudors, the clumsy policy of George III., the idealism of Rhodes, the strength of Hamilton and Washington, the efforts of half the whole number of the great chiefs of the earth—this heresy was reprobated by the Bishop and by Brandon, each from his own high standpoint. The Bishop knew that it would be easier to raise money for a new cathedral in Cayle than for a poor tin tabernacle for the naked

worshippers in the Pacific Isles. Brandon had his left from Mr. Worthing, reminding him that Cayle was far from the sea, and consequently not interested in the navy. Each bore his grudge against the provincial ideal. To Brandon it meant an organization of chartered anarchy. It was an ideal of license and narrow egotism, said the Bishop. Had not St. Paul made Christianity by crushing the provincialism of the Churches? Then let us have a strong power in the land, in the world, to curb the wayward wickedness of men and enact the catholic perfection of the law of God.

'Let us,' said Brandon, 'give power to the few with brains to use it.'

They cried, like the children of Israel, for a King to reign over them. But what was the King to do? To what use would they put the great power they desired?

So far they had journeyed hand in hand, and speedily. But, then, ahead of them there loomed two ice-clad peaks of purest principle, clear of the tangled growth of detail, the little rocks and streams on the slopes of daily life. To one of them the Bishop pointed.

'That is my goal,' he said.

There was to be peace in all the land, in all the world. An iron rod should break the sins of men, a wand of charity should heal their wounds. Temptations should be swept away by Act of Parliament. Navy and army should no longer plunder the food of the poor and inflame the passions of the people; these curses were to vanish from the English world. Enlightenment should take the place of wealth. Drink, horses, fornication, cards, stock-jobbing, idling, Sabbath-breaking, capitalism, and blue blood—these should return to the devil from whom they came; from the treasury of God should come new stores of innocence, labour, and peace. The great new Government would restrain the vices and confirm the virtues of the people.

'And you, Lord Charles, do you come with me?'

The snowy peaks of ultimates were the native place of Brandon's mind.

'Grant me,' he said, 'for the purposes of argument,

that without militarism your reformed country would be smashed by foreigners, your Empire taken away, your people starved. What do you say, then? Are you still for peace?

'I would rather,' said the Bishop, 'see the ruin of this people than the stultification of the word of Christ. I am still for peace.'

Brandon threw away his cigar and stretched out his hand for another. This he lighted at leisure. Then he answered the expectant Bishop.

'I suppose you don't in the least know what pleasure it gives me to hear anyone who will face the logical consequences of his opinions? I haven't had that pleasure for weeks, though I've often tried to force my friends to give it me.'

'Your friends are fools and cowards,' said the Bishop. 'I know the people whom you mean. But what of yourself? Will you face what I face?'

'No,' said Brandon.

'And why not? Are you also a coward and a fool? or with what arguments do you assail me?'

'Oh, my lord,' said Brandon, 'we are miles and miles beyond the range of any arguments.'

That was true, for the Bishop had finished his ascent, and stood serene on the pinnacle itself. There no argument could serve or hurt him. He had stated without passion, without cant, the extremest aspiration of his politics and his faith; the volume of his zeal had swept him clear of all but greatness and simplicity. Brandon had never seen strength in man like this. He was powerfully impressed.

What the Bishop asked of him was not a string of argument, but a mere confession of his faith. Let him join him on his pinnacle, or climb, as his intellect had strength to do, to the opposing height.

'I used to think,' said Brandon, like one beginning his autobiography, 'that there was nothing I hated like intolerance.'

'Good,' replied the Bishop; 'go on.'

'And now I don't think that any longer. I've lately

come to think the thing I hate most is the habits of people who raise prejudice into principle, and hurl it at the ideas they can't smash intellectually; but I think that is what I shall have to do to you.'

'Do it,' said the Bishop; 'only define your prejudice.'

But the enunciation of a great idea had stirred the sympathy of Brandon. He wished to hear about it, not to carp at it.

'Tell me,' he said, 'how will the Liberal party take your moralism? I don't mean the real Liberals, but the party.'

'They will raise evil prejudices into pompous principles,' the Bishop answered.

It was a compliment to borrow Brandon's phrase, but after it there came a weakening of the Bishop's tone. He lamented and cursed. The Liberals turned moralists were his natural allies, yet timorous and narrow. They would follow him in details, with bits of moral legislation here and there, with possibly a reduction of armaments and a righteous foreign policy; but the pace was slow. So dull were their spirits, so hardened their hearts, that the great ultimate of political moralism must still for years, perhaps for generations, be a secret, told only to the noblest of the few.

'Yet you tell it to me,' said Brandon. 'What if I betray you and oppose you?'

'Opposition from you would be the greatest service anyone could render me,' replied the Bishop.

But he returned to his declamation. God would not forsake His saints, he said. In time even the weak-kneed Liberals would bow to that ideal which aimed only at the health of the souls and the welfare of the bodies of all mankind. Arguments against it there were none. Not even Brandon could produce one. Prejudices would melt in the sunshine of holiness. How could they prevail against the ideal of love and peace and righteousness, while men still called themselves followers of Christ? The end of that ideal must be in triumph.

'And you, Lord Charles, will you not tell me your attitude?'

'Can you guess how I spend my evenings?' said Brandon. 'You are probably under the impression that I occupy myself with immorality, but that is not so. When I have done my dining or speech-making, or whatever it is, I go and lie on the rugs in my father's library, and browse among the speeches in the old volumes of the *Times*. And there I have seen the whole history of Liberalism. I have seen it flourish and wane, and give place to the moralism whose triumph you predict. Liberalism was opposed by obsolete Toryism, and Toryism was beaten. But Liberalism was also opposed by Disraeli, the biggest man whose speeches appear in the *Times*. He showed the folly of Liberalism by proving that it was opposed to all the facts of life. The facts of life make folly of cosmopolitanism and individualism, and therefore Liberalism was smashed, as Dizzy foretold. He saw things as they are and must be, not as they possibly ought to be. Your moralism will be opposed by obsolete utilitarianism, and will beat it. I agree in that. But if Dizzy were here, I think he would oppose you, too, for I believe from the bottom of my heart that the facts of life are not moral any more than they are Liberal.'

The Bishop smiled triumphantly.

'You are using arguments,' he said; 'you are wandering. I have answered you already when I told you I would welcome national ruin if God has so ordered that His service leads us there. I have nothing to do with the facts of life. You must leave your arguments, my friend, and confess your prejudice.'

Brandon begged forgiveness. He had only used the arguments as a preliminary apology for his prejudice.

'And what is it?' the Bishop demanded. 'How will you treat me?'

'I will treat you,' said Brandon, quietly and with amusement—'I will treat you with a whole-hearted, uncompromising, merciless hostility.'

The Bishop had expected it, and liked it, and looked down kindly upon Brandon. There is always something pleasant in a satisfactory personification of all that one abhors.

'You indicate your prejudice, but you do not define it,' he said. 'Do that, and I ask no more. You are not a Liberal, not a moralist, nor a lover of mankind; you do not study the welfare of the world you live in, nor of the human race to which you belong, nor of the religion you profess. May I ask you, without rudeness, if you have any prejudice beyond the mighty prejudice of self?'

'I am certainly a good deal prejudiced in favour of myself,' said Brandon.

'Yes, and you are nothing else,' the Bishop answered.

Brandon got out of his chair, threw away his cigar, pulled his waistcoat straight, put his hands in his pockets, stretched his neck, and laughed a laugh of embarrassment mixed with real amusement. All of this was to cover the horrible priggishness of what he meant to say.

It came in lazy tones, indifferent and slight—a remark which the listener might treat as serious if he chose to take that trouble.

'I don't know,' he said. 'I've been puzzling about it lately. I'm sure I'm not a Liberal or a moralist, or any of those other things you said. I think I'm an Englishman. That's what I feel when I listen to you.'

## CHAPTER XIV

It will be admitted by the most uneducated person who ever claimed to be a sceptic that there are times when signs and wonders fill the air. The portended catastrophe, indeed, does not always follow, but now and then, by some chance, it does. It was so in Cayle on the memorable twenty-fifth of June when Vitryfield became the haunt of many frightened persons who had seen lizards in their path. They were not without some tangible excuse for fear. That night was to be the occasion of Mrs. Darbyshire's performance at the theatre and of Brandon's at a meeting of working men, and none could say which of the two would commit the more horrible excesses. Lord Wight, the first person whose nervous excitement was visible to Alice, fell into a fit of jumps at the mention of the play during breakfast. But he had long been irritable on that subject, and Alice was used to it. He had no notion of her intention to be present at the performance.

Later in the day came Mrs. Worthing, fresh from house-keeping, and she, from the innermost recesses of party confidence, begged Alice to play truant at the last. The play—she had heard such things about it, from sources unimpeachable—the scarlet repute of Mrs. Darbyshire the actress, her unseasonable lapses—that she was sure no modest girl should venture near. Alice was amused. The alarmed are not always the best alarmists, and Charley's interests had driven a steam-roller over girlish modesty. Much more frightening were the gentlemen of local Liberal eminence who came demanding interviews with the candidate himself. Alice had orders not to let them see him. His campaign speeches, they

admitted, had been uniformly good and prudent. Of course, of course! And Alice bowed in acquiescence. She knew that no achievements of her variable brother could have been more thin and worthless than those last month's speeches. He had spoken at dinners, at meetings of particular sects, at Mr. Worthing's garden-party; but this was to be his first appearance before a working-class audience. Alice played the part of comforter. Was he not cautious? she said. Had not that been the feature of his campaign? Her visitors would assent, look anxiously out of the window, and depart with a request that she should urge him to be on his guard against those possible ebullitions of appalling socialism which made the flesh of man to creep. So the atmosphere of apprehension thickened, and it was continually harder for Alice to keep her spirits above it.

Mr. Worthing came soon after luncheon. He begged to be allowed an interview. On being denied, he fell to admonishing Alice like the rest, and, like them, he seemed to tell but half of the fear possessing him. Rumour promised a grand audience at the meeting, he said. But he most fervently hoped, if it were not an insult to suggest it, that no part of the speech would be calculated to alarm the middle-class supporters of the Liberal cause. There was value in the votes of working men, but they must not put all the party's eggs in one basket. Alice smiled at the nature of the metaphor. That particular form of imprudence had not been among the recent vices of the Liberals as she knew them. Moreover, she would have liked to ask who it was that provided the one big basket and filled it full of eggs. How many eggs would the other baskets have held? But the sight of fear in the great optimist restrained her. Lord Charles was prudent, he said; but they knew he was unaccountable at times. And Alice, devitalized by breathing the breath of alarm, consented to an interview. She was too restless to play watch-dog any longer.

'He has been here the whole day,' she said, as she preceded Mr. Worthing through the open window of the library. There was a grass plot, hedged in with

walls of box, where Brandon walked with his hands in his pockets and his head sunk low.

'Will he be very angry?' asked Mr. Worthing.

'Go to him,' said Alice.

She was saddened afresh by the sight of him. Brandon, looking up from under the brim of a Panama hat, jerked his shoulders in annoyance and swung off through a gap in the tall box hedge to the gardens beyond.

'We must hope for the best,' said Mr. Worthing.

'I will speak to him,' said Alice.

Then the last of her peace departed, and was absent for more hours than she could have foretold. Was it wonderful? The men whose fears had crept into her heart knew Brandon well enough to make them tremble, but they knew him not so well as she did. They judged him analytically, she historically, and a thousand memories of boyhood haunted her mind as she toyed with one occupation and another for the rest of that long day. He was unruly, they said, too much inclined to flatter the democracy, and lacking in experience; but she, from nearer knowledge, could have told them that he was more, and worse than this: for there were times when he seemed to plunge beyond the governance of his own reason. Among all who feared there was none but she who realized the greatest danger.

Again and again she was on the point of going to him, and something held her back. Here also there were precedents. Many a piece of mischief had been done because she warned him off it. It is but a step from warning to suggestion.

She played the piano, picked roses in the garden, drew up a little map of the dinner-table, with the evening's guests arranged in order. At tea her father joined her. He, on the main point at least, was refreshingly serene.

'I think we may expect a remarkable speech to-night,' he said

Alice started.

'Have you heard what line he means to take?' she asked.

Lord Wight explained he only judged from the studious

preparations that had been going on in the garden. Precisely ; but such studious habits in the past had not resulted in speeches alone. The intense quiescence had been a symptom of other things equally remarkable. There was but one word for what Alice feared : it was a prank.

She drove to the station to meet the trusted cousin who was engaged to take her to the theatre. Should someone ask her to give language to her fears, how foolish she would seem ! What prank could he well play ? A socialistic outburst ? It was matter of opinion whether that should rank as folly or as most daring wisdom. And her feelings were not based upon opinion. Was it some mad castigation of his friends ? Or was it that he might refuse to speak at all ? At least, she had his recent undeviating prudence to comfort her. Was it likely, because his nerves were irritable and his audience to his taste, that he would commit an act of folly ?

Nevertheless, as she drove she called her eloquence about her. Even now imagination could set her arms around his neck, charge her with that power of touch that is akin to magic, enkindle her tongue, fire her visible love. By these and by their friendship she would conjure him, by his ambitions—which were hers—by the awe attaching to a woman's instinct, to control himself. She would force her fears upon him, speak of his late abnormal moods, and pray him for once only to be guided by her fancies. The morrow of the averted danger should see them start for London and a tonic-giving week of gaiety.

So, at the fitting time, she went to see him, calling her magic to her aid. Magic was in the air that day at Vitryfield, and had not far to come. It was lurking round the corners ; you could feel its presence as you walked. It haunted the rooms where nervous visitors had sat. Its trail was in the corridors where Brandon, in his mystic mood, had been, or might at any moment be. And it came when Alice summoned it ; but, as to the slave who stole the wand of his master, it came to rend and not to serve. It killed her petitions on her tongue.

That day at the back of her mind she had the thought of the madcap boy who was always ominously calm before the storm. She had forgotten the girl.

The moment she entered his room—it was while he was dressing for dinner, and after she had dressed—her magic, which was nothing but the ancient link of union between them, turned and gripped her. She could no more have breathed her fears than she could have cursed him. The first glance at him transformed her. With a shock like the shock of tremendous news, it broke on her that the calm of many days was past, the storm begun. She did not know what secret was in it, but in an instant she understood afresh that Nature made the breaking of his storm to sweep away her sanity with his. It had been always so. She saw the lightning playing in his face. She felt the tremor spreading through her frame. She shut the door and went to him, where the westering sunlight fell upon his head, and knew, for better for worse, that he and she were launched upon a sea of chances where the whirlwind of his wild vitality must drive them God knew whither. She touched him as one touches something charged with electricity, and laughed softly in the joy of adventure. She gave herself, as usual, to his mood.

The phoenix lived a hundred years. Brandon in as many hours could smoulder down to ashes and burst again to vivid life. He was only tying his tie. His only greeting was to ask if he were late. But Alice saw the change in him.

It was one of those occasions when he chose to be dressed extremely well. Alice made him put on another tie, a shade smaller than the last, and she took up a hair-brush, saying she must make the back of his head look more political. He was hurried in his dressing, not thinking very much of her; but he mocked her genially for all she did. He asked whom he was taking in to dinner. It was Mrs. Worthing.

‘Quick, then!’ he said. ‘Tell me about babies. Which begins first, the baby or its original sin? What do you feed them on?’ Finally he tucked a handkerchief up

his sleeve, and beamed at her. 'How am I looking? Is my ugly face looking its best?'

'Charley,' she said, 'you're looking handsome, and you're looking a boy again. You have been such an old professor lately.'

So she kissed him, and went out before him into the corridor, her nerves rustling pleasantly in the breeze of a mysterious excitement like that which floated round one often in one's childhood.

Alice knew the hundred reasons why it is wrong to take a motor-car at fifty miles an hour; but when her brother drove her she forgot them. That was an experience familiar enough. All through the evening she kept the sensation of the furious career downhill, the fearful curve they were rounding, the precipice beneath, the thrill of madness, the intolerable pulling of the car. But now, for a space, it was sheer delight.

The Bishop and his wife came late. There was a period of waiting in the drawing-room, where a dozen guests discussed the prospects of the evening. Brandon stood by Miss Bruce, the chaperone cousin, talking gay nonsense, to her infinite amusement. Alice could hardly take her eyes off him. They were crowding round her—Potts and Worthing and the other political men—pressing her for the latest news of his intentions. Had she kept her promise to warn him? Had he been sworn to prudence? Would it anger him too much if even now they counselled him? But they had no experience in these matters; to turn the north wind from his course would have been easier than to influence Brandon then. The time had passed.

The late guests came, and the party went to a rather hurried dinner. Alice sat by the Bishop. There was plenty of sparring between them, such as they both loved, on points of social ethics. But Brandon was within earshot, and Alice in delicious apprehension. Half the time he was safe with Mrs. Worthing, almost shedding tears at the story of her Fido's illness. That he could so concentrate his attention was not the least of the symptoms he presented. On his other side, and near to

Alice, was a political lady in yellow sleeves, advanced in years and views, who had written pamphlets on the rights of women. She engaged him. Alice marked his eyes and trembled joyously. The lady was pleased to vent her wrath on a certain noted editor whose crime was Germanophobia. Brandon answered recklessly :

‘All eminent men become fanatical. He is a Germanophobe. The leader of the Opposition is an Anglophobe. One has to make one’s choice.’

Mrs. Worthing acted on a frantic signal from her husband’s eyes, and captured him before a further indiscretion had escaped. There was only one more squib let off. It was in reference to the recent pledge concerning the release of Lynch.

‘The only time when an English subject can attempt murder with impunity is when he shoots down his fellow-countrymen fighting for their King.’

‘You call him a murderer?’ exclaimed the political lady.

‘I only call him a national nuisance, who ought to be hanged,’ said Brandon.

‘That is a strangely jingo sentiment from one who calls himself a socialist.’

It seemed that she was bent on flaunting all the terrible words that the whole table had studied to suppress.

‘I have never thought that socialism was altogether incompatible with a regard for the interests of society,’ said Brandon.

The intervention of Mrs. Worthing followed immediately.

At the end of dinner, when the wine had gone round once, men and women rose together and went to put on their summer evening wraps for the drive to the Assembly Hall. Only Alice and Miss Bruce remained. They stood by the hall-door ; the marshalling of the departure was to be done by them. In the first carriage went Brandon and his father, with Dr. Potts and Mr. Worthing. It was a characteristic of Lord Wight’s that he was generally the first out of any fuss.

Then Alice felt the strain of separation. She was not

in a mood to be happy away from the centre of interest. It was like the old occasions when Charley went off to set a booby-trap for the governess, and she was left at the end of the passage 'keeping *cave*.' She had gone up to him where he stood staring rather vacantly across the great cold hall, and roused him to animation by laying a hand upon his arm. 'I know you will come back with your shield or on it,' she said. He, worst of slaves and best of lords, stirred her blood by answering, 'We'll both do that.' And as her face was very near to his, she could feel his electricity in what was like a physical emanation.

Just as they were calling him away he seized her arm and asked eagerly if he might wake her up when he came home. He might be rather late. She assented gladly. Of course, it was what she wanted, because on the morrow he might be a stable-boy again.

The men of the party followed in a waggonette, and, lastly, in carriages, the women. The wife of the Bishop inquired if Alice were not going with them.

'I am taking my cousin to the theatre,' said she, safe now in her father's absence, and she felt the old triumphant thrill that sweetened the days when she went to race-meetings with the schoolboy brother in face of a world of disapproval.

Nevertheless, as the wheels of the carriages crunched more faintly in the distance, she sent her hand for sympathy to the arm of good sensible Jane Bruce. Every spark of elation had deserted her. With the enchanter she lost the enchantment. Two thousand working men might find it, but to her it was lost. The previous terrors assailed her, shrouded in vagueness, with the warm June evening chilling her and a haunted unfamiliarity about the empty hall within. It was fairyland she had just returned from, and she brought thence two impressions: one was that Charley's speech would be the greatest of his life, and the other was that in his triumph he would die.

She shuddered as she went indoors. For her peace she must act, and she made a stir of hurry about starting

for the theatre. There she had definite work to do, as she explained to the faithful cousin. It was her business to show that Vitryfield was not abandoned to sheer Puritanism. Those who were bad enough to go to the notorious play should feel that Vitryfield was as bad as they.

Accordingly, a studied gaiety was assumed: all the way to the theatre Alice tuned it up. It wavered rather when they saw the Market Square with the crowds pressing round the doors of the Assembly Hall, but that was only envy of the people who would hear the speech. One piece of news—a precious atom—came from the footman who opened the carriage door at the theatre. He said they were turning people away from the hall because there was not room for another person. Then came the burden of her evening's work. Politically, her appearance at the theatre was a complete success. Making it her business to linger in the vestibule, to receive the young men in her box between the acts, to show the gayest brightest front to everyone, she won for her party the favour of Satan while Brandon conciliated the mammon of righteousness in the adjoining hall. Practically she achieved for him the advantage of being in two places at once, as far apart as heaven and hell, though we have it from father Abraham that this is next to impossible. A number of hunting people from the country were present.

'We thought you and Charley were having a prayer-meeting to-night,' said one of these.

Alice admitted it for Charley, but for her own part, she said, she preferred Mrs. Darbyshire's prayer-meeting instead. Repetition of such remarks could not fail to enhance the sporting fame of Vitryfield. Speaking of Charley, she said 'Poor Charley,' and you understood how much he would have preferred to see the play.

Yet there was a price exacted. The play, of which she was not destined to see the end, was entirely revolting to her during every moment when Mrs. Darbyshire was on the stage. It was the story of how ruin befell a fair-haired youth who, before an English audience,

generally appeared in leggings and a pink stock. He was apparently about twenty-one years old, and it was not long before the unspeakable Mrs. Darbyshire had him well on the road to hell. The audience gleefully recognised a slight facial resemblance between him and the scapegrace of Vitryfield—a likeness, too, in the sporting tastes and habits at which no one laughed more heartily than Alice. His boon companion asked if they were thinking of standing for Parliament. He replied that it was too much of a bore to speak at teetotal meetings when one wants to be doing other things. Alice suspected several other tit bits that brought down the house to be equally the work of local genius that had tinkered with the play. But the point of the performance was the behaviour of Mrs. Darbyshire herself. To Alice it was even more tragic than disgusting; for the woman acted well, had talents that should have admitted her to the richest fields of her art, and she had come to this. It was to be supposed in charity that she came to her ruin by drink, but there were other possibilities. She had a natural grossness, displayed at every phase of the performance, and in the woman rather than the actress. Like Brandon and the Bishop, she was one who hurried on to ultimates, while her sphere was not so decorous as theirs. Alice sat in misery.

After the first act several people came into her box. The orchestra, with mock majestic Sullivan marches, kept her spirits high. Of Mrs. Darbyshire she said that the woman was remarkable, but hardly a subject for conversation. Much more readily she gave herself to talking of the caricature of Charley. She argued elaborately to prove that Willoughby had written the play. The internal evidence was overwhelming. One man took her seriously, and him she urged to send a challenge. Yet all the time she kept the sensation of the straining motor at the curve, herself no more a tingling passenger, only a spectator, with the fear, but not the joy, and the crash assuredly not far away.

Just as the curtain rose upon the second act, she had what she most longed for—news. The door of the box

flew open, and Dusky Williams, in his Sunday best, burst in, with blazing eyes, buzzing like a beehive with his whispered information. He reported things splendid, splendid, splendid. They were cheering. He could not say five words together ; it was wonderful ! And laughing—they were cheering and laughing ! You would think they were all drunk.

‘And what is he talking about ?’ asked Alice.

‘Himself, m’lady, and them, and betting. He says he’ll give them tips for the Ditchingham races.’ [‘Is betting demoralizing ? Is it ruinous ? Come to me for your tips, and I’ll promise you shan’t be ruined.’] ‘Oh, m’lady, can’t you come and hear him ? It would make you proud.’

Alice reminded him that she was bound to stay.

‘Go back now,’ she said. ‘It was good of you to bring me news. Good-bye. And, Williams, come to me again if anything very exciting happens.’

He promised and ran off. He had made it clear to Alice that Brandon had definitely thrown the respectable section overboard, and was plumping on the popular vote. Doubtless he was in excellent form, having his own way at last. Mr. Worthing would be beside himself ; and the Bishop——

She turned back to her detestable duty. But Williams’ news had drawn a film across her observation. With her mind reaching to another place, the excesses on the stage passed almost unnoticed. Hitherto, though her sensations had been busy, her mind was free, and external circumstances had their due effect upon her ; but now she had something for her thoughts to bite. Sensations dozed, and she regarded Mrs. Darbyshire with the indifference of a hardened libertine. She realized that a big event was happening, as presentiment had foretold, and there would be a party split. She set to work on tactics. It did not take her long to map out a policy—a stage quarrel between Mr. Worthing and her brother, one with the sheep and the other with the goats. Each one could gather his flock about him, reprobate the other, and effect a grand reconciliation at the last for the sake

of the Liberal party. The plan might be workable, Mr. Worthing was a very loyal friend.

It had become quite obvious that Mrs. Darbyshire was coming to a point where her art might be expected to away with her. She had to extort money from the st born but susceptible youth with the pink stock, and talents were giving the negotiations a more vivid color than the author of the play perhaps intended. How long would the victim hold out? How far would the lack of cupidity drive her? There was something in her that meant business, and Miss Bruce roused Alice from her meditations by pointing out the imminence of danger. It was a race between Mrs. Darbyshire's dramatic instincts and the fall of the curtain on the second act. She had already abandoned tears for embraces, but the orchestra had their instruments in position. The time was very critical.

It was just at the moment when the audience, with mixed feelings, perceived the triumph of decency, when the curtain fell, and the orchestra crashed out a deafening noise to celebrate the victory, that Dusky Williams turned to the box. Alice was seized with a frozen calm. Even before the torrent of his words began she saw that though he was excited as before, he was also in terror.

She was afraid the people would hear him through the music.

'M'lady,' he cried, 'he's running wild. He's broken out; he's ruining us. He's cursing and swearing at everyone—cursing the Association, and the Bishop, and Mr. Worthing, and the temperance people, and the people, and the chapel people, and the Irish. Says they all enemies of England. Oh, m'lady, come across and help! We don't know what to do.'

From Alice, out of the rising tumult of emotions, came one question:

'Were they still cheering?'

'They're puzzled,' he said. 'They don't understand. Some of them are angry. They're calling out now and then. They're not cheering. But, m'lady, the gentlemen on the platform, they tried to stop him, but he won't.'

They're blazing wild, and he don't mind. He looks as if he's off his head, m'lady. For God's sake, come at once !'

'What good should I do by coming ?' she asked.

There was no answer but a fresh torrent of description. The tenderest spot the speaker touched was when he asked :

'What will his lordship say ?'

What, indeed ?

Two young men came casually into the box—Roger Cooper and another. The alarm they read in Dusky's face was reflected in their own, and it chilled the heart of Alice to see it. They were about to withdraw, seeing that they had come upon a scene of stress, but she detained them. The matter was already public beyond recall. She did her best to put a light colour on what she told them ; her sense of humour served her. But she knew that Cooper's soft dark eyes saw through pretences. They all felt rather foolish.

Mr. Upworth joined them, more or less to the disgust of everyone. Alice thought it would be best to dismiss Dusky Williams, who was looking such a death's-head, drawing everyone's attention, and she told him to go back and look after Charley. Cooper explained to Mr. Upworth :

'It seems that Lord Charles has said some imprudent things at his meeting.'

Miss Bruce engaged the other youth, and tried to talk about the play. But small talk at tragic times only grates on the nerves.

Dusky began a reluctant departure, and Alice turned impatiently towards the curtain, as if commanding it to bring relief by rising. But at that point the situation was struck by lightning. They heard, as their nerves went rigid, a voice unrecognisable for emotion calling out :

'Where's Lady Alice Brandon ?'

The next instant Mr. Worthing burst into the box. Mr. Worthing had been chairman at the meeting. He stood before Alice and held out trembling hands.

As facts lie dead until the scientist has touched them,

so news is not news until emotion has been poured .  
The sight of Mr. Worthing made the caldron of em  
to boil over before the first morsel of his news fell from

'My God !' he cried ; ' he has sold us ! He has ru  
us, betrayed us ! Lady Alice, have they told you ?  
you know of it ? After all these weeks he has sma  
our work to pieces. I knew he would lose his head  
warned you, but now I tell you he has sold us.  
mad ! My God ! do you understand ?'

Mr. Worthing could give no details till the via  
despair were empty. When the optimist falls he  
like Lucifer.

' He covered us with abuse—me and the Bishop and  
He abused the party and the leaders and the princ  
He ranted socialism, and I thought that was enou  
and then he confessed—God forgive him !—he confe  
he was a Tory. He declared himself a Tory, and  
make Tories of them all !'

Out they went, Alice and her cousin, the young n  
Worthing, Upworth, Dusky Williams, with several of  
audience who scented a sensation, and did not pause  
speak until they reached their destination. Mr. Worth  
was the only one who spoke, and that because he co  
not stop. There was no thought of hats or cloaks. T  
reached the theatre doors, regardless of the astonis  
eyes of those who were talking and smoking in the ve  
bule ; they hurried across the square, entered the Assem  
Hall by a side door, went down a passage, up a few sta  
and drew up as they came to the small parlour wh  
was used as a cloak-room by the gentlemen who sat  
the platform.

They were separated from the platform by a sh  
passage and two doors. There reached them only  
thin sound of one man speaking, nothing else.

Alice opened the door that led into the passage,  
tened, and shut it.

' He is still speaking,' she said.

No one answered. She looked at Cooper.

' Shall we put him off ? This takes us right on to t  
platform.'

'Put him off!' shrieked Mr. Worthing. 'That's what we're here for. Go on—go on! He's making Tories of them all this time. It's only you can stop him. Be quick, for Heaven's sake!'

'Better wait,' said Cooper, who, of course, was of the other party, and saw no harm in the creation of Tories.

They stood uncertain, Mr. Worthing tearing his hair, imploring, and reproaching.

'Can't we just open the door? He wouldn't see us.'

'Can't we get in at the back of the hall?'

'There's a gallery, where the ladies are. Quick! let's find the staircase.'

But Mr. Worthing settled their doubts himself by plunging through the door and down the little passage to the platform, and then they went after him. It seemed unsafe to let the distracted man run on alone, and for Alice, at least, there was no more checking the wild desire to see and hear and be in touch. What was it that was happening in that silent hall?

Whatever was in the mind of Mr. Worthing, whether to make a scene and drag the speaker from his place, or only to point out to the rest the true horror of the affair, there was no free-will permitted him. For he, like the little group that followed him, like the Liberal gentlemen on the platform, like the crowd in the hall, was held transfixed.

It was a scene to give pause to the maddest. The party from the theatre, crushing through the little door, found themselves at a corner of the platform, at one end of what on the theatrical stage would be the line of foot-lights. The hall, where there was more light than fresh air, was not very large, but it was packed to the last inch with something like two thousand men, and on the faces of these the signs of the hour were to be seen. There was wonder and doubt, incredulity, the present magic of the spell, the growing promise of a mighty crash whose nature none could know or guess, not even they themselves.

Such was the scene to the left of Alice and her friends. Looking to their right, they saw what was hardly less

impressive. The thirty gentlemen of Liberal eminence who had sat upon the platform round the speaker stood now at the back of the platform and against the wall, huddled together as if shrinking from something unclean. They had rage and terror on their faces. Of some you might have said that they were cringing, though not of the Bishop or Lord Wight, and all of them were held riveted by wonder and excitement.

So on the one hand were the angry gentlemen, and on the other the bewildered, hesitating, fascinated crowd. In an instant both of these were seen and done with. For the rest there was only Brandon.

He stood by the side of the table, alone, amid empty chairs. Many a time and in many a scene had Alice seen him fight with fate and enemies. With his fists in the streets of Cayle she had seen him fight, with desperate wits to escape the punishment of some wild prank, with scorn and ease against some pedant who reproved him, with bitterness across a dinner-table, with hot loyalty defending himself. But now she saw him fight for everything that life contained. In this hour he had burnt the boats that would carry him back to his past and onward to his future, and he must scale the favour of this crowd or he must drown.

Now, his words were striking like hammers on an anvil, measured, even, pitiless, ringing low with passion. There were no gestures made, and yet the man's whole body seemed to be wrung each instant by the vehemence of emotion. He was not asking them to follow him; he made no claim to loyalty or pity. Though his fate was trembling in the balance, even now the cruelty of death was on his lips. Merciless as the writing on the wall, he marshalled again the charges he had made; like a grinding mill-stone he crushed out the old faith before them. Sentence after sentence, short, slow, simple, was wrenched from him, and it was as though he knew each word was irrecoverable. Then came the end of the argument. It sounded the finality of the grave. They could no more be Liberals.

Once more Alice looked at the faces of the crowd; she

gripped her fan till the carved ivory cut into her flesh. The strain! Why had Charley done it in this way? For though, in anger, they might have risen then and howled him to ruin, they could not, had they wished, have cheered him. The awful intensity of gloom forbade it. Yet she saw that they were not taking this fearful pause as final; the link of feeling was still between each individual listener and the speaker. As yet there was no current of emotion set up from man to man among them. They were not one crowd; they were units before the speaker. Doubtless Charley had seen that, too. How long would it be before a common emotion stirred them? What would the emotion be? What would be the nature of Charley's last attack? Was he never going to end this pause?

Yes, and there was a change. The air was lighter, more comfortable, and the speaker's voice was softer. For good or ill, they were coming into personal touch once more, he and they, though it were for the last time. There was also hope. The future had some brightness, and the past was rich with tender memories that stirred. And this was music, for Brandon's voice was full and low, more beautiful than his face. He was even smiling. Here and there crept in the slang phrase that was like him as they knew him. He paused, hesitated for a word, grew boyish before their eyes. Yet he was sad, and it seemed that he knew he was past forgiveness. Once or twice there were kindly words shouted from among the listeners. And then came the end.

This was the fearful moment, and Alice turned eyes of terror to the silent crowd. But she was premature.

The speaker had sunk his head. He raised it once more, slightly, and looked round the crowd as if he had asked a question and received no answer. The old confidence came back to his manner, the old familiar smile.

'And now—are we still friends?'

He had won. Like thunder straight from overhead the crash of cheers burst out. Two thousand men rose up, jumped on to chairs, yelling, waving, struggling, lest by a single particle that great reunion should fall short.

They it was who were guilty and ashamed, they who had failed in loyalty, they who had allowed a temporary coolness to come between the leader and his men. They were his tenth legion. Nothing they could do was enough—loud enough, wild enough—to mark this pledge of hearts.

'Yet I am a Tory,' said Brandon, when he could be heard.

A Tory! They were all Tories.

'So are we! We will be Tories!'

'And will you give me a cheer for Mr. Chamberlain?'

Yes, they mingled that name in the roar. They would have cheered the devil had Brandon asked it of them.

So the light came back to Alice's eyes, a new trembling to her heart. She was overspread with the shimmer of great joy. She smiled at the cheering people, smiled even at the cowering men at the back of the platform, and sought, with radiant face and dancing eyes, to catch the notice of the unmoved victor. Again he was growing solemn, and he was very still. He had looked death in the face.

He signalled for silence. As the cheering waned someone called out:

'Three cheers for Lady Alice Brandon!'

A fresh roar arose, and Alice smiled and bowed. Brandon noticed her. Their eyes met, but he made no sign.

'Too late, too late,' said Mr. Worthing, as though he could have averted the calamity by coming a minute sooner.

'Do you see what he has done?' Cooper shouted in Alice's ear, for his enthusiasm was not wholly governed by mere noise. 'Do you know that this is a Liberal meeting? He has made them all Conservatives. It's marvellous. There's been nothing like it.'

Alice, however, could not listen to him. She was lost in receptivity to the emotion of the instant, the cheering and the triumph and the conqueror.

That the achievement was great was acknowledged afterwards by friend and foe, and not only in Cayle. But in mitigation of the marvel it must be admitted

that these men were not Liberals of long standing, such as are found in other social classes. They had no special reason for belonging to any party. To a great extent it was their personal loyalty that had pinned the Liberal badge upon them, and Brandon, in taking away that badge, did little more than change the situation he himself had made. But the catastrophe was equally great.

The wheel of sensation made another turn, and the tumult of cheers was followed by a silence not less exciting. Brandon was holding up his hand. He was going to speak.

Not until the silence was complete did he begin. Then his words came crisp and passionless, spoken in low tones, yet very clear.

'So you say that you are still my friends.'

A threatened renewal of the cheering was restrained, and Brandon continued, speaking slowly.

'I am very glad, for I am talking to you as a man can only talk to friends.

The truth can only be told to friends. And it was in order that I might tell you what I know to be the truth that I have sacrificed—a seat in Parliament—the support of these gentlemen—most likely my career—perhaps my home. You see that I have not much to gain.'

He paused, amid absolute silence.

'All these I might have kept had I chosen to lie to my friends.

'To-night I have posted my resignation to the Liberal Association. I have done with them; so have you.'

They broke into cheering.

'I tell you again that I have spent the best of my time, the best of my brain, in studying the welfare of the people. That is because your streets were my playground when I was a boy, and because you have been my friends.'

His level tones became touched with passion.

'And I tell you again, though it means my ruin, what I have found out, what I believe in my heart and conscience—that the friends of the people are to be found

in the Tory party, and in the man whose name you have cheered to-night—in Mr. Chamberlain.'

They cheered it again, or cheered the speaker.

'The election is coming. I ask you to go to the poll, and to give your votes——'

He paused, as though it were hard to say the word. He raised his voice.

' . . . To give your votes to Mr. Willoughby.'

They cried out from all over the hall :

'You ! You ! You shall be Tory member !'

'No, it is too late,' he said. 'Mr. Willoughby must be the Tory member. I ask you to vote for him—not because I like him—or admire him—but because he goes to Parliament to support the men and the cause that I have seen with my eyes and heard with my ears to be for the good of the people. Gentlemen, I have done. This meeting will not end with the usual formalities. I ask you to go away quietly, to think of me sometimes now that I have fallen from the position I was so proud to hold—the position of your future representative—and before you go I ask you to give three cheers for the candidate, our candidate, Mr. Willoughby.'

But that was asking rather more than they could give at present. It was for Brandon that they rent the air with cheering, his fortunes that they thought of, his name that they cried, as if trying to save him from the effects of his political suicide. They did not cease to yell at him, cheering and shouting their incoherent encouragement ; nor did there seem any reason why they ever should. For some moments he stood still and watched them.

He was to have been a member of Parliament before he was twenty-three. That dream had proved delusive. Nevertheless, had they been present in the Assembly Hall—the disciplinarian ushers of the private school, the bullying boys, the censorious dons of Oxford, and their pupils in whom there was no guile—they must have acknowledged then, in satisfaction of the cause of vengeance, that this scene at least was not quite what they expected.

To relieve a strain that grew intolerable, Brandon walked to the group where Alice was. Alice was dumb. One imperative instinct moved her, and she gave him her hand and smiled. She would not have the world imagine that this cataclysm had made her loyalty to swerve.

Mr. Worthing broke into reproaches and tears, but Brandon treated him as something too tedious to attend to. He shook hands with Cooper. In manner he was dazed and distant. Alice drew him towards the door.

'Charley, let us go home,' she said.

They went back to the cloak-room, all but Mr. Worthing. There immediately they were followed by the gentlemen who had sat upon the platform. By the favour of Heaven there happened something to make them all laugh, for Miss Bruce looked along the passage and cried out, 'Oh, Charley, they are coming!' as if they were going to kill him. Brandon looked at the faces around him, and selected Cooper. He asked him to take the ladies to their carriage, and to do so that very instant. He did not care for the presence of women at a scene.

The Liberals, with shattered nerves, trooped in. Lord Wight and the Bishop took their coats and left the room at once. The smaller fry remained, falling on one another's necks. There was a pretty pandemonium.

'Good God! drink and tobacco!' said Brandon, who stood indifferent in the midst of all, with Dusky very near him.

His voice was husky. Staring vacantly, he searched his pockets for a cigarette-case without success. He sent Dusky to get his coat from the pegs on the wall. A hubbub of recrimination sounded round him.

In a moment he was sucking in smoke like a man satisfying a desperate physical want. It was immeasurably more important than the things these men were saying. There was Dr. Potts screaming in his face through the smoke. Even the bathos of physical violence was not spared, for Dr. Potts was maddened by his indifference, and raised a stick. He was instantly knocked down by a blow between the eyes from Dusky.

They escaped, and gained the smell of the summer night. Was this Cayle, or was it a famous night at Oxford? Others might remember the deed of the last two hours, and talk themselves blind about it, but Brandon had no past. The past he would remember in the future; both were dull; life throbbed only in the present. He had reached a point when the present is the master moment of all time.

He stood with Dusky in a room in the Royal Hotel, abandoned cigarettes for a pipe, drank brandy, and talked as though the gallery of heaven were listening. It was barely half-past ten. He had to claim from Nature all the essence he had stored through weeks of lethargy. Life was charging in his veins; his wheels ran faster and faster; he generated force as great as when he turned the Liberals into Tories, and his dark admirer marvelled. The brandy was not more fiery than his blood. He made a new philosophy, or published what had raged in the dark places of his soul since Venning heard him preach the creed of vengeance. Vengeance he tossed aside. There was something better. He had learnt himself and found new lusts. He must have a field for fighting. Fighting was his deeper passion, where there was freedom not to be found in plotting vengeance. He must be where he could hit out freely, in the battle of the world, on the side where Nature had placed him. He had cut the monstrous link which bound him to his foes. Perhaps he thought it was really Venning who was present, whom he stormed with the new thunder of his faith. Dusky, at least, he bereft of comprehension. His language bounded on with a force beyond the force of alcohol, and Dusky heard it like terrific music, not like words. But he perceived enough for his capacities: the figure of Brandon, vibrant as he paced the room, the din of battle for his background, war in the blue of his eyes, his face flushed, his hair just ruffled, knots of muscles on his forehead, yet in all a ruddy boyishness—these things made a whole where Dusky found the thing he knew, a leader, a meaning for the words of fight that alone his understanding rescued from the stream of language.

'Damn this room!' cried Brandon. 'We want air—a change. We've got to be on the move somewhere. Don't look at me as if I were the Archbishop of Canterbury. D'you know where we're going? We're going to see Willoughby.'

One more drink and they left the hotel.

'Isn't it risky to go there now?' asked Dusky.

'Prudence has had her day,' said Brandon.

'But, my lord, don't go if it isn't prudent.'

'Dusky,' he said, 'do I look as if I would do what was prudent, you devil? I'm going to Willoughby, and so are you. Willoughby and I are brothers now. Why, man, you've no sense of humour! I shall have to learn his ways, I suppose; but to-night I'll teach him some of mine. I'll introduce him to my friends; that's you, Dusky. I'll teach him how to be a Tory. Good God! he was head of my house at school, and once he licked me.'

They walked on, and the earth was whirling at a pace unknown to calendars. Men who passed were ghosts; stars were falling from the skies. Their arms were linked, their heads were nodding, and the flow of words continued. To talk of the past—could words describe what it was like when the victory hung in the balance, when he thought the audience were about to hoot and curse? That was before he had cowed them into listening. Then the fight, the fight! till he risked all on the one question, 'Are we still friends?' In Dusky's ears it rang like a tale of desperate adventure from the famous days of chivalry.

They stood at the door of the house of Willoughby as midnight struck, and Dusky prayed his chief to remember caution.

'Suppose he's in bed?'

'With an angel watching over him? Even that shan't stop me. My dear Dusky, your dull perceptions have not jumped to the greatness of the occasion. It is unique among conversions. Think of Willoughby stretching out his hands and saying, "Brother Brandon, receive thy sight." Quick, Dusky! what shall I say to him? I must start with a mouthful of morality. I'll tell him

the wise candidate maketh glad the voter's heart. *Floreat Etona!* Never too late to mend. I've given up drink and taken to Toryism. Saints preserve us! he's opening the door himself!

'Henry, let me introduce to you one of the two thousand working men who cheered your name to-night. This is Mr. Williams. Dusky, this is the Tory candidate. Candidates are born, and not made. As Upworth is here, I suppose you've heard the news?'

Willoughby cleared his throat.

'I have,' he said. 'I did not expect to see you to-night, Brandon.'

'Oh, you'll see a lot of me now. Give me your hand. Are we friends? Have you a place for a *fidus Achates*? Have you any whisky?'

They went into a smoking-room.

'This has come as a surprise,' said Willoughby. 'Of course, I cannot doubt that you acted from the highest motives.'

'Did I, Dusky?' asked Brandon, still clinging to his arm. 'Bless my soul! I can't remember. And now, my dear Henry, far be it from me to suggest that you or I or anyone should be mixed up in the toils of a despicable intrigue, but it has occurred to me—a sort of wandering fancy—what a particularly fortunate coincidence it would be if Sir Benjamin Mason should happen to vacate the seat before the Liberals have got another candidate.'

'I am glad to hear your views,' said Willoughby very coldly.

'The views of an expert tactician,' added Mr. Upworth.

Brandon was vaguely puzzled, but his mood did not lend itself to doubtfulness.

'You've got a big meeting next week. Put my name on your placards, and it will double your numbers. Let me speak for you that night.'

'That would need consideration,' said Willoughby.

'Consideration be damned! I want to make a Tory speech at your meeting.'

'It would not rest with me.'

'Yes, it would.'

'I cannot answer such a request all at once. You see, we are rather taken by surprise.'

'Oh, you'll get over that; you'll get used to it,' said Brandon. 'It grows upon one. Good Lord! I believe I've come out of the frying-pan into the fire. Henry, you dolt, I don't want you to take me for what I am; I want you to take me for what I'm worth. It's business.'

'My lord, let's go,' said Dusky.

He could not bear to hear that faintest note of pleading in his leader's voice. He saw what Brandon could not see—that these men were for the time being regarding not a convert who had joined the Tories, but a Judas who had wrecked his friends.

'You shall hear from us later,' said Willoughby.

It had fallen flat, and Brandon with his friend went out into the intoxicating air of the night. But depression could not be allowed to last. A palate spoilt with splendours craved for new sensations; there must be a plunge to fresh excesses or vitality would grow into a nightmare. Talk was not enough, not even the cursing of Willoughby.

They made for Vitryfield, but not because that place was home. Rather was it the supreme sensation.

'Had you a father, Dusky? Oh yes, you know the meaning of paternal wrath. Damn them! they keep it for the mornings. But we'll do a forced march; we'll outmanœuvre them, and compel a night engagement. Night is my time. You shall protect me. Think of that devil Potts. You smashed his face in, didn't you? I keep a special list of people who have used their fists for me. They're my special men, Dusky. You're one of them. There's a fellow called Blake, by God! and Alice, when we were kiddies.'

It came, the supreme sensation, in the room at Vitryfield, where Lord Wight still sat in talk with Mr. Worthing. As Brandon would have wished, it was one incomparable explosion, fierce and short.

'I have borne with you long enough. I have strained my patience, and compromised my just authority. I cast you forth from this day. I will not weary myself by

telling the tale of your iniquities. You were born to be my sorrow, and you have grown to be my shame. You killed my wife at your birth ; you stole the heart of my daughter ; you have scorned my kindness, insulted my authority, betrayed my confidence, sullied the name I gave you, dragged my honour in the dust.'

Mr. Worthing put out his hand as if to restrain a blow. There was not the slightest shadow on Brandon's blazing animation. He showed, if anything, an unaffected appreciation of the scene.

'Where's Alice ?' he asked. 'May I see her ?'

'You may go from my house,' said Lord Wight, 'and do not dare to return. I forbid you ever to speak to my daughter again. I send you out penniless. I leave you nothing but my name, because that I cannot prevent your using. Go, and your ruin be on your head !'

Brandon drew a long breath. He put out his arm for Dusky.

'Well, I'll go,' he said. 'I shall always regret having caused the death of your wife. Come on, Dusky ; I'll go and change my clothes.'

'Would it never cease ?' thought Dusky. He was tired, but he must still dance with the hours of that mad night. In his bedroom Brandon changed his clothes, put on boots and breeches, a shirt of flannel, and a coat of Oxford extraction. Similar clothes he found for Dusky, and made him put them on.

'We're going to ride,' he said. 'We'll go and see Rupert St. Agnes.' They went to the stables and roused a groom. 'These are my last dealings with my father. I steal three of his horses.'

They rode off, taking the third horse with them. The joy of galloping was sufficient outlet, and Brandon at last was silent. Into Cayle, and out of it, they rode, and Dusky thanked his stars for his boyish days of farming ; for had he never touched a horse before that night, he knew that he must still have ridden at command.

They came to the outlying village where St. Agnes leased a rectory and lived his country life two miles from the Market Square.

'But how shall we get in?' demanded Dusky, thinking of the unconscionable hour and the household all in bed.

Brandon's tongue was loosed once more.

'Do you think I'll fail? Do you think I'll not get in? This is not a night for failure. Come on! come on!'

St. Agnes slept beneath the little red-brick tower where the ivy of the old clergymen was the guardian of past traditions till the rectory should be a rectory again.

They tied up the horses, observed the open window of the bedroom, went nosing round among the ivy.

'Here, Dusky; I'll go first, and damn you if you can't climb after me!' said Brandon, not explaining what he had discovered.

It was a drain-pipe, leading past the window. Some god was in the mood to favour them that night. He had placed the pipe for them, and the climb to the bedroom was a trifle.

In the room they lit a match and a candle, which Dusky held as he stood at the foot of the bed.

'Get up, you dog, you devil!' Brandon cried, shaking St. Agnes's shoulder. 'What a night to lie in bed! Here, Dusky, give me a wet sponge. Man alive, Rupert! where are your senses? I'm a Tory!'

'You're a Dutchman,' St. Agnes groaned, struggling with the heaviness of sleep.

'I tell you I'm a Tory! Dusky's another; so is every working man in Cayle. Look at me, Rupert. Don't I look a Tory?'

'You look damned drunk!' said St. Agnes. 'It's the middle of the night,' he said. 'What's up?'

'What's up—when I told you I was a Tory? Oh, it'll break my heart. I thought you were a sportsman—the only one in Cayle. By Heaven! you shall be one to-night, if it's the first time in your life! Get up! We're all going to ride out into the country—to the devil, and beyond.'

St. Agnes rolled out of bed; he stood blinking in the light of the stupid candle and the dazzling flare of the news he heard. Brandon strode about the room and

swore from sheer excess of life. Dusky gave some brief account of the events.

'Take off those lousy rags and put on something you can ride in!' Brandon told him. 'We're all going to ride. I've had a devil in my head, and now he's in my arms and legs. Dress, man, or I swear I'll fight you.'

They went into the dressing-room. Speed, speed, was Brandon's madness of the moment. St. Agnes yielded, as needs he must, and the soul of his friend became his soul. He raced into his clothes, quicker and quicker, Brandon driving him.

'You fellows want a drink,' he said.

'And tobacco,' Brandon answered. 'Give me a lot of tobacco.'

Downstairs, and they satisfied these wants; to the garden, to horse, and like dust in the wake of the hurricane they followed Brandon as he rode.

The unearthly light of dawn was in the valley, on the ferns and trees beside the road, stealthy and suspicious. Cottages and landmarks sped past them; all was bewitched with the unfamiliarity of the mystic hour. There were the signs and portents of new day, though the world was still in death. But Brandon had life. Life, through a mournful boyhood and a dreamy youth, he had stored against this day. He opened his coffers, reckless and magnificent, and scattered a profusion of his wealth.

'My God! if there were bullets whistling round us!'

St. Agnes was beside him.

'They've called me selfish,' Brandon said. 'They're fools! There's no such thing as selfishness. I'll tell you about selfishness. It is self plus something else. I've tried it. Self plus liberty, when I was a boy in breeches. Oh, come on, come on; this pace is stifling!'

They plunged ahead, Dusky following.

'Self plus vengeance, when I found myself a man. Self plus philosophic truth, when vengeance was a bore. It is always self plus some idea, saints and sinners alike. The idea becomes self and self becomes the idea. And now—my God! when I'm sober I shall wish I hadn't

said it—what is coming now is self plus—— No, I won't tell you.'

'Tell me, Charley,' cried St. Agnes, for the fire had entered into him.

'Do you know what it is,' Brandon answered, almost shouting, 'to get the whole world into the pupil of one eye, to have its war-cries in your ear, and the taste of blood in your mouth? I tell you, there's going to be God's own battle on the earth. Already the campaign has started. Do you understand me?'

They rode more gently; they dropped to a walking pace, as St. Agnes with tongue and eye demanded the telling of the Viking creed.

'You have never really lived,' said Brandon. 'You have never felt the touch of battle. You don't even know what it was like in an Oxford election when you had a man to back or a party backing you. But you've backed a horse, Rupert. You've watched it as it ran. You've put your heart into the race. You know that much of the thrill of contest. I tell you that for me there is no sport outside fighting. And now I smell the biggest battle in the history of life. I've chosen my side.'

They halted, for it seemed that there was something going to burst. It was imperative to be still and wait. Brandon was staring at the valley below them, his chest heaving, and the others watched him.

'Look at that valley, and that river. Do you want to see the cursed foreigner camping by the Vitry? Do you want to see the little Ruperts grow up Dutchmen in a bed-ridden island off the German coast? Think of the big nations.'

The forefinger of the sun came over the hills in front of them. They watched it, while no one spoke. Then Brandon turned and set the grip of his eyes on St. Agnes.

'Rupert, it's the greatest game that ever man has played at. Will you be my pal? Will you put your money on the English horse? I'm ruined. My father turned me off to-night. Will you swear to stick to me, and stake your cash where I stake my life? Will you run me, through thick and thin?'

St. Agnes was less surprised than he thought he ought to be.

'I'll run you,' he said. 'I'll give you cash, and anything you want. I promise that.'

'Thank God for a sportsman!' said Brandon.

'There's Camley Cross down the hill to the right. There's an inn there. I'm dead beat, and I've half killed Dusky. We'll go to bed there. Come on! Down the hill at a gallop!'

## CHAPTER XV

'ARE you quite sure I'm not taking you away from your housekeeping, my dear ?' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet to the Dean's wife. 'Though, indeed, I don't know who could do anything so dull as that after last night. I came round here on my bicycle as soon as ever I had had a word with Lilian Upworth and that dreadful Mrs. Potts. Does your Ethel know ? And what does the Dean say ? I hear he has started off for Sir Benjamin's already.'

The Dean had gone with Upworth and Willoughby to consult Sir Benjamin Mason.

'Poor Alice left home first thing this morning, never to return. One scarcely retains the power of being shocked by anything.'

It was impossible not to sympathize with a middle-aged lady in such a predicament ; but there was cause for still greater distress.

'And nobody knows for certain,' she almost wailed, 'whether she went of her own accord to be with Charley, or whether her father turned her out because she went to the play. Personally, I'm sure it was the former. Then, Mr. St. Agnes has gone in pursuit of Charley, who escaped from the town last night on horseback. But I suppose you've heard everything already, dear ? I could scarcely dress myself this morning. The news came with my first cup of tea.'

Mrs. Russell was such a silent woman that it was to her house that everyone came who had news to give or comments to express. Mrs. Willoughby, in a pony-trap, was but the precursor of a small invasion of people who joined the two ladies at the Deanery.

'My coachman says that Alice was seen driving out to

Ditchingham Rectory,' she announced, as her contribution. 'Fortunately, Charlotte St. Agnes is at home, so it won't necessarily look as if she were going to Rupert for protection.'

She was told of Rupert's pursuit. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, when pressed, admitted that the report came through her butler, via the milkman, who arrived in his cart between seven and eight.

'Nothing will make me believe that Mr. St. Agnes could do anything so impulsive,' said Mrs. Russell. 'My instinct tells me it is impossible.'

'My dear, your instinct hasn't been to the rectory back-door, and my milkman has. Is that the *Times*? Oh, what does it say? Fancy using small type for such a thing! "Election Intelligence.—Cayle: great sensation caused by extraordinary incident." Oh, look! Here's Mr. Upworth coming up the drive!'

Mr. Upworth came to the drawing-room. Each new arrival caused the story to be retold in the style employed to narrate the history of the House that Jack Built. As soon as the new-comer had given his breathless news of the outrage committed by the Cow with the Crumpled Horn the rest of the party filled in all details, back to the Malt that lay in the House. The rhythmic sequence is not in the least impaired by your having heard it once or twice before.

'I always said that the result of reading poetry and all that history——' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, who was cut short by Mr. Upworth.

'It's due to a steady cultivation of a morbid and unprincipled excitement,' he announced. 'It is but a step from the racecourse to the—ah—to such a performance as last night's.'

'At any rate, he was intoxicated when he came to our house,' said Mrs. Willoughby; and, fearful lest a mere opinion should be ignored, she barbed it with a fact: 'Henry said he could hardly stand up straight. That is a sufficient explanation of the whole thing. People when they are intoxicated always do just what they would never have done when sober.'

Truly the problems of life are simple enough if rightly handled. Nobody questioned the finality of Mrs. Willoughby's explanation, but nobody was deterred from beginning the research over again.

'Whoever can have put it into his head?' said Mrs. Russell, who was not really a silent woman, but merely one who liked to get out her remarks while other people's mouths were shut. The two things often lead to the same result.

'Indeed, I always did wonder where he got his ideas from,' Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet agreed.

It is a maxim of parental psychology to deny the possibility of automatic action in the young.

'It could never have been Mr. St. Agnes.'

'There's something rather mysterious about that Roger Cooper.'

'It cannot be him. I know for a fact his parents have forbidden him ever to see Lord Charles.'

'Take my word for it,' said Mr. Upworth, 'there's a woman at the bottom of it somewhere. I've not lived fifty years without learning how the world wags.'

Mrs. Upworth, the mother of eight, came into the room, and gave a more material turn to the discussion.

'At any rate,' she said, 'he's ruined. That's always the way with these visionaries. What'll he do now, I wonder? I don't expect his poor father will go on keeping him in idleness at home. He'll turn him on to the world with a shilling, I expect.'

'They say a distant cousin of his married some London solicitor—quite a *mésalliance*. Perhaps he'll get a job as clerk in the office,' Mrs. Willoughby suggested.

Tact was in the Willoughby breed.

'A very good thing for him if he does,' said Mrs. Upworth, who was herself the wife of a solicitor. 'That would teach him something of the world. Young men always have an idea that they can live on air.'

'What is the Dean's opinion?' asked Mrs. Willoughby.

'The Dean always says he has no opinions,' said his wife; 'otherwise he would never have been a Dean. But

my own view is that the whole trouble comes of thinking you are different from other people.'

'That is just what Charley is,' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet very eagerly—'quite, quite different.'

Mrs. Russell discounted this remark with generosity due to her knowing that her friend was admittedly suffering from a temporary paralysis of moral feeling. Mrs. Willoughby had less mercy.

'He is different from other people,' she said, 'which means that he is an eccentric. If only people would call things by their proper names we should have less mis-directed admiration.'

Her own Henry always called things by their proper names.

'I don't care; I've forgiven him everything, and I mean to take his side,' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet. 'And I am perfectly certain he did what he thought right. I nursed him when he was a baby, and now he's a martyr to the Conservative cause. He has the highest motives.'

She was borne down by a perfectly irresistible syllogism.

'He has betrayed his own friends,' said Mrs. Upworth, supplying the first premise.

'Which is not the act of a high-principled man,' added Mrs. Russell, giving the second premise.

And Mrs. Willoughby drew the incontestable inference:

'There's not a shadow of doubt that his whole conduct was unprincipled from first to last.' *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

'As party women, we ought at least to feel gratitude,' said Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, her moral sense still dormant.

'We can hardly be grateful for benefits purchased at the price of sin,' said Mrs. Willoughby, quoting, surely, from something heard at the breakfast-table.

No more significant remark was made than this of Mrs. Willoughby's, for she had sources of information not open to others, and knew something of the official attitude of the Cayle Conservative party at its fount. Mr. Upworth shot a glance of keen approval.

For the rest, the conversation of these persons, though enriched with every variety of argument and epithet and

metaphor, might have been rendered with equal effect by their joining hands and chanting in unison: 'We disapprove, we disapprove, we disapprove.' But conversations are seldom conducted on those business-like lines.

In point of fact, though Cayle was humming all that day with rumours and comments, in which kind words were confined to lowly roofs and humble streets, there was nevertheless a tendency to reserve final judgment until the attitude of Willoughby and his friends should be declared. It could not be expected that society would forego the pleasure of being censorious, but condemnation was to a great extent provisional. The *clientèle* of Willoughby, by a coincidence, headed the hierarchy and politics alike, and almost everything depended on their pronouncement. It can be imagined what a battle raged round Willoughby. For the question was necessarily one for absolutely instant decision. Should Brandon be welcomed, he might be turned to effective uses; if he were repelled, his hostility might result, and his value would be seriously impaired for the future, because a notorious rebuff does not strengthen any man's prestige. It was necessary to consider future elections as well as the immediate situation. With the Dean and Roger Cooper and Sir Benjamin pulling him one way, his father, Upworth, and the Mayor the other, Willoughby had a bad morning. Unfortunately, St. Agnes, the incarnation of cheque-books, was not present.

With regard to matters that were already history, Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet has the credit of guessing correctly as to Alice. Her father, in the fulness of his wrath, had been pleased to visit her in bed, where she, waking to the thought of hearing Brandon tell his story, was forced instead to hear Lord Wight pronounce his doom. Then began a battle unexampled in the annals of Vitryfield. Alice fought for her brother's pardon. Time showed her how hopeless was the struggle. At last, her fury being in proportion to her love, she dealt a cruel vengeance by saying that she, too, would go out into exile—'and it will be you who are cast adrift, not Charley.' The rest of

that night she spent in packing her possessions and her brother's, assisted by Jane Bruce and the astonished maids. Then she drove to Charlotte St. Agnes, her friend.

With Brandon and his companions the events of the day began later. It was close on twelve o'clock when they rose and bathed and breakfasted in their inn at Camley Cross. Brandon was still in the best of spirits. He showed no marks of weariness. All three of them rode back into the town, and a great suppressed excitement was within them. But they met with nothing save the greetings of women at their doors, who called out, 'God bless your lordship!' and the military salutes that the young men were accustomed to give to Brandon in imitation of Dusky. All this was usual enough.

With some difficulty St. Agnes broached the question of Alice and her relations with her exiled brother.

'I shall let her alone,' said Brandon. 'She will have to decide whether to stick to my father or to me. I can't try to influence her.'

'I felt sure you would say that,' St. Agnes replied, most untruthfully. He was always pathetically glad when Brandon's notions of right and wrong coincided from the first with his own.

In Market Square they parted, Dusky taking the horses back to Vitryfield, St. Agnes going to his office, and Brandon starting off on business of his own. First he went to see Mr. Worthing, hardening himself to the painful nature of their meeting. He wished to become aware of his financial position. There were reversions, he believed, and the property of the late Lady Wight, which could be acquired independently of his father. But a very great disappointment was in store. With sympathy, but with little explanation, Mr. Worthing told him that his position was wholly dependent on his father's powers of appointment. There was neither present estate for him to enjoy nor any reasonable expectation to be mortgaged. Brandon realized that he was dependent on charity, not only for his political advancement, but for his daily bread.

Fresh from the shock of his blow, he went to Willoughby.

He quite understood the importance of the forthcoming interview.

There were very few persons of society in Cayle who did not, within a few days, hear a full account of this critical meeting of Willoughby and Brandon, the old Tory and the new. It was even told how Brandon came collarless, with his coat buttoned up round his neck, wearing boots that had not been cleaned, and making a perfect picture of the youth who is expelled from home and is travelling to the devil in a third-class carriage. It emphasized the nature of the meeting as being one between prosperity and adversity, for that was what it became. Brandon, fallen, exiled, beggared, was yet a man of consequence in Cayle. What Willoughby did was to reduce him by one word to a choice between obscurity and absurdity. He refused to recognise him in any way. He refused to take of the accursed thing, however profitable it might appear. He followed those of his adherents who urged him to risk losing the votes of many Tory working men rather than pollute himself by acknowledging Brandon. The thing was accursed. It would only bring embarrassment to those who trafficked with it. If the Tory working men were to vote for Willoughby they must be won by other means than an alliance with Brandon. To win the seat in such a way would be to make it doubtful whether the decent Tories would have him for their candidate again.

All this was explained by Willoughby with that exuberant lucidity of which he was a master. The task was far easier than he expected it would be, for Brandon showed no fight. He sat like one receiving sentence of law, and not even in his manner was there anything to make it necessary for Willoughby to pull his courage together and remember that he who hesitates is lost. Cayle was greatly impressed when the descriptions of the encounter went abroad.

Willoughby, by telephone, sent for the Mayor, unknown to Brandon. The Mayor arrived, and Brandon realized that he was required in the capacity of witness. For Willoughby so contrived that even a dull grocer, little

versed in diplomatic arts, could have no possible doubt as to what was his way of treating Brandon. The Mayor bulged with approbation. Each insult was a pledge of *bona fides*. The anti-Brandon Conservatives need have no fear of double-dealing in the candidate. So the word went out that the rival youths had met, and one of them was crushed. Society learned with relief that it would not have to take Brandon into its arms. The dogs of reprobation were loosed at once. Another laurel wreath was placed on Willoughby's brow, and everyone remembered they had prophesied the ruin of Brandon years ago. The story of the interview was passed from mouth to mouth, tasting sweet, and tickling moral palates.

Brandon met Dusky in the square, and took him to have tea in the garden of the big hotel. There he shortly described the conduct of Willoughby; it was the only time he ever spoke of it. Resentment he had none, for if it paid Willoughby to insult and repulse him, of course, Willoughby was quite right to do so. Such hostility was not wanton. Willoughby, again, might be a fool, and a pernicious one; but men like him should be destroyed, not blamed. Dusky perceived that his friend was hard hit by the day's events. It was good for Willoughby that he did not come within the grip of Dusky's wrath that day.

Falling to dreams, Brandon took a fancy that he would like to see Venning. He would go to London. There were a few pounds in his pockets, which he shared with Dusky, telling him to inform St. Agnes of his movements. They went and hired a motor bicycle, and Brandon started for London.

If it is sought to perfect the dramatic colour of the day when ruin befalls a man or an institution, nothing is more effective than the coincidence of physical injury with the breakdown of worldly prospects. This is one of the reasons why in politics so much more attention is given to warfare carried on with ship and gun than to the deadlier form of combat which is effected under economic laws while the brotherhood of nations is enjoying the blessings of peace. Once there was a country bank

struck by lightning on the day of its failure. And Brandon, riding his motor bicycle through a village in the north of Buckinghamshire, ran into a dog, was thrown down, and broke his leg. He was taken into an inn. It was exactly four-and-twenty hours since he entered the Assembly Hall at Cayle.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE simple geography of the Dun Cow Inn has neither interest nor importance, except for the fact that it lived in the minds of several persons whose fates are connected with this history. On the ground-floor were four rooms—parlour, bar, kitchen, dairy. Upstairs were four bedrooms of corresponding size. One of them, of which it needed not an expert architect to tell that the kitchen and kitchen fire were beneath it, had a window that opened through thick honeysuckle on the garden of the inn and the southern sunlight. Its walls and sloping ceiling were adorned with whitewash; its upholstery was cleaner to the eye than to the touch, and the mattress of its substantial bed was still the home of a fair quantity of feathers. It was in this room that the New Brandonite party came into being.

Brandon was no stranger to ill-health, but what he had never before experienced was a condition in which no degree of physical or mental stimulus would give him the power to rise to the needs of action. Nervous prostration he understood and could control; a broken leg appalled him. Tea, brandy, excitement, were powerless against the horrible finality of a limb that would not work. It emphasized his ruin. He was disgraced and exiled, and now, on being prostrate, he was also sad.

But while he lay chained by that despair which is in great part wrought by physical exhaustion, his comfort was drawing near. There was much of quaint simplicity in his nature, and a childlike belief that every person he met was put into the world to serve him. Experience might disappoint this faith, but could not break it, and a wonderful charm belonged to anything which went to

justify it. Such a charm there was for him about the days that followed his downfall and his accident.

His first thought when they took him into the inn was to telegraph to St. Agnes. The wording of the telegram was characteristic: 'Come to me here at once. Charley.' The unwritten meaning was that, if a mere demand were not enough to bring St. Agnes to his friend, then Brandon did not care to have his services at all. The attitude was an exacting one. But St. Agnes did come, at the end of a long night of sleepless pain and hopelessness, and all his big bones were turned to water by the pity which he felt. There was a terrible contrast between the man he found in bed and the man who had ridden with him to Camley Cross in the flare and clatter of life. Yet his pity proved him no true Brandonite of the purest essence. Others, had they found the leader lying like one dead, with hollow eyes and flagging spirits, and the hoof-marks of calamity stamped on his face, would have felt something nearer fear than pity.

'I'll wire for Lady Alice,' said St. Agnes.

But Brandon would not let him. Here again pride forbade that Alice's inclinations should be forced by any sick-bed appeals to her emotions.

'But she's waiting at the rectory for news,' said St. Agnes; and he told the story of her leaving Vitryfield.

Then Brandon's face began to tighten up. The telegram was sent, and in the evening Alice came, and a mass of luggage with her.

'It is a funny thing,' St. Agnes said to her, as they eat their chops and turnips in the parlour, 'that Charley is charmingly grateful if you lend him half a crown to pay a cab, and yet, when someone does the things for him that you have done the last two days, he hardly seems surprised.'

This was after he had told her some of the strange sayings of Brandon on the ride to Camley Cross, and the mutton-chop dinner tended to be prolonged.

'His emotions can never be seen,' said Alice, 'till he is standing on a platform and speaking; but it should always be possible to feel them, I think.'

St. Agnes had never had a word of thanks from the man he saved from penury. It did need some effort to free himself from disappointment.

'You are dull in recognising emotions,' said Alice, not far from right in guessing his thoughts. 'Every time Charley puts his arm in yours, it is an act of affection and of gratitude. He has nothing else to give, you know.'

St. Agnes felt the lash of conscience. It was he who was ungrateful.

'He's the best fellow in the world,' he said.

'Have you ever wondered,' said his grave-eyed tutor, 'what he would do supposing he found he had to order your head to be cut off? Suppose it was necessary for his purposes politically, I mean—thinking of what he told you the other night at Cayle.'

St. Agnes was puzzled that she should think of the same odd situation as Cooper had imagined; but he said he had never thought of it, and waited, in his patient manner, to hear the views of Alice on this important subject.

'He would sign the warrant without a word,' she said. 'That is why he is great. And when he died they would find your name written on his heart. That is why we feel towards him as we do. I could never have left home if I had not felt sure of both those facts.'

'You are always right about these things,' he said, 'and so I suppose I must think as you think.'

'Yes,' she said.

But she was very kind and gentle to him in those days, as if he had been a new boy in a rough school, and under her protection.

Brandon's nerve was restored by the presence of friends, and he faced life again. But further stimulus was to follow. On the second day after the accident came Dicky Blake, of Oxford fame. He had hastened to Cayle in sheer delight on reading of Brandon's change of sides, and thence he came to claim the privilege of serving his friend in the hour of darkness. He brought the smell of broad acres with him. Without specifying what victory he meant, he cried, 'You'll win, you'll win!' as he stood

by the invalid and wondered what part of his person he could assail with his customary dangerous caresses. He occupied the fourth bedroom of the inn, and his presence added to the gaiety of the village. Venning also joined them, for a student of letters may be capable of emotions as strange as those of a squire's son, and Venning had a tongue, if not a fist, to use in the service of his lord.

So Brandon's room became the scene of merry meals and hours of talk, nonsensical and otherwise, the starting-place for many small excursions into the surrounding country. And gradually it became possible to discuss the future. There were four points of view, each one put forward when its advocate found himself alone with Brandon. Blake's argument was that he must return to Cayle and fight.

'You must smash those devils through their hats. It's the old Oxford story over again. You must show them that our side doesn't give in.'

From Venning there came the intellectualized replica of this argument. He considered it the height of imprudence for Brandon to acknowledge defeat in Cayle. Cayle was his sphere of influence; he must nurse his prestige, and not lose the advantage he had won when he gained so strong a hold on the affections of the working men.

In opposition to this view was that of St. Agnes, who recommended Brandon to turn his attention from Cayle to London, to live in princely style in Town, work up his political connections there, contest some hopeless seats, and get himself returned to Parliament when he had earned the gratitude of the Tory party. Finally, from Alice he had advice which urged him to come to no decision, but wait events. She knew that he was in a state of bewilderment; so was Cayle, and out of that conjunction she hoped some favourable chance might rise. In other words, she was waiting for Brandon's next outburst of vitality.

A curious influence was thrown into the scale by a letter which came one day from Cooper to St. Agnes.

'Do all you can,' he wrote, 'to keep Brandon out of

Cayle for the present. I cannot explain why I advise this, but you must take it on trust from me that this is the best policy for him to follow. Do not let him appear in Cayle, or have any correspondence with political people here.'

'Now, what the devil does he mean by that ?' said the man to whom it was addressed.

Brandon, as usual, was sulky about giving opinions where he had only subterranean intuitions to guide him. But he considered Cooper's letter very carefully.

'Whoever Cooper may be, he is asking you to act like a damned coward !' said Blake. 'I wouldn't listen to him.'

'I scarcely know him,' Brandon said, 'but he's a clever fellow.'

Venning had the kind of mind that scents treachery, and does not like to speak it out. He discovered from St. Agnes that Cooper was a friend of Willoughby's, and he urged Brandon to return to Cayle. But Brandon was in no hurry.

Indeed, his interest in Cayle was waning. He had a quantity of letters every day, mostly from home, showing how many were the people who sympathized with him in his change of parties, if not in his way of effecting it. The Dean and Sir Benjamin Mason, however, were the only men of consequence who wrote. The other letters were evidence rather of affection than of influential support. Many of the same kind came from Oxford, and Brandon derived the utmost pleasure from reading the compliments paid him. But when they took shape, and fell into line with the personal services rendered so generously by closer friends, offers of money and the like, the effect was to put Cayle a little out of perspective, and concentrate attention on the wider issues. At any rate, it was observed by Alice that he had never talked so little of his personal relations or so much about national politics.

'What are you all doing here together ?' asked the Vicar's wife when she came to call. And Alice, before she could stumble to the obvious answer, was dazzled

by the point-blank pertinence of the question. What were they doing? What was to be the course of the strange union of interests that was forming at the Dun Cow? They talked of many things day and night, but the thing never mentioned was the day of parting. Some time Venning was to set himself to work for a prize fellowship at Oxford. Some time Blake was to force his way to a commission. But there was no mention of these things. The future seemed to hold no cause but Brandon's. Some gossip came to Alice, by way of her brother, who had it from Blake, that the village doubted if her position were quite respectable. Of course, it was a joke, but at the same time there was an overwhelming triviality about such criticisms that was a shock and an enlightenment to Alice. Day after day had made her feel more clearly the nature of the thing, the force, the atmosphere, which was generating in their dirty little home. But when she was brought to consider her own position, the absurdity, the paltriness of such a consideration, was an index greater than any she had found to throw light on what was happening around her. And not long afterwards she was able to talk about it to Venning in plain language.

'Mr. Blake is the most wonderful thing about us,' she said to him, shading her eyes to watch where Blake in the adjoining field was teaching the village boys to box.

They were in the garden, supposed to be picking gooseberries; but Venning was most incompetent at the work, and Alice was never a very persevering Martha. Her observation quite stopped Venning's efforts, and in his answer, so far as he dared, he invited her to be expansive. They sat down on a seat.

'With Charley's other friends,' she said, 'I have been able to see some obvious reason why they belong to us, but Mr. Blake baffles me. He is not interested in ideas, nor in politics, like Rupert St. Agnes. He is not even interested in Charley, in any proper sense of the word. Yet there could be no keener partisan. Then, he is really very moral, and yet he is delighted by Charley's treatment of the Liberals in Cayle. In anyone else he would

be the first to blame it, and he has not the intelligence to justify it, as it is. He just does what he is told, and thinks what he is told, and glories in it. Yet I am sure he is a capable man.'

Venning felt called upon for a solution of the problem, but he would not give it.

'I have often wondered at it,' he said. 'I think there are explanations, but when I think about them they seem to spoil the immense significance of the fact itself. That is an intellectual crime, I am afraid.'

'Oh, we are all too clever by half, Mr. Venning,' Alice answered. 'It is just that fact that makes Mr. Blake so very important. We believe because we understand. He believes without even trying to understand. People will never trust us, but they will always trust him. He says he wants to get a commission. Do you think he would abandon that and come and work for us?'

Venning had not time to wonder at this talk about beliefs from one who but a fortnight since had called herself a Liberal. He was engaged in marshalling the reasons why he was not shocked by her laying violent hands on the career poor Blake had chosen.

'That is a difficult question,' he said.

'He must come,' said Alice; 'we want him so badly. Everyone likes him at first sight. He will be enthusiastic and simple and well-bred, and he will make us an army of friends among people who would be frightened by all the rest of us. We will take him back to Cayle, and put him into Parliament some day.'

Venning crossed his legs and drew in his breath.

'You propose to take possession of his life,' he said. 'That is an act which needs the most weighty justifications, and I assure you I think it has them. Without them it would be quite shocking.'

'I am sometimes shocked,' said Alice, as though she were confessing to bouts of drunkenness. 'You overcome your shockedness by justifications. My plan is to go and look at Charley. When Rupert is shocked he has to be simply shaken. It doesn't much matter what the method is, does it?'

'It is justified,' said Venning, ignoring her digression, 'because of the immense significance of there being such a man as Blake in our party.'

'Immense importance,' Alice corrected, with a question in her voice.

'If I had your faith,' said Venning, 'I would call it important; but as it is I ought not even to have said significant. It is merely very interesting and rather tragic.'

'You are going to be depressing,' said Alice.

'I am. It keeps coming to my mind that Blake is a figure in a fearful tragedy. Think of him and the class he belongs to. "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Solomon was a working man, you see. But Blake's work was all done by his fathers. No philosopher of any time could look at him without knowing that he is the aristocratic flower that blooms on a race of conquerors. He has all the grace and glamour of a public school and a University. Whenever he speaks it is to say something felicitous and delightful, though his mind is poor. He was born in luxury and brought up with every advantage money could buy, on land where his people have lived for centuries. He is as good-looking and as healthy as anyone could be. His ancestors were baronial tyrants who had some trouble in keeping their heads on their shoulders, but he has met with nothing but kindness and comfort. He has that fascinating never-say-die expression in his face, but he has the tenderest heart in the world. When he is fierce it is only his tenderness having a game, and when he is insolent it is only his courage spoiling for a chance. But he is living on Chatham and Nelson, and but for them he would have no right to live at all.'

'Then Chatham and Nelson were not in vain,' said Alice, 'for Mr. Blake represents a type of life that is quite delightful.'

'Chatham and Nelson made it possible for Blake to play games and live up to his code of honour,' said Venning. 'They made it possible for him to treat all his advantages with that magnificent indifference of his.'

I assure you I feel the fascination of it just as much as you do. That is why I say he is a tragedy, because neither Chatham nor Nelson nor good manners nor horsemanship nor fine clothes nor anything that Blake possesses will save him from the ruin that is going to overwhelm him and everything English, as you and I know it will.'

'I still call it more important than tragic,' said Alice, the new-made Tory, quickly aware that Venning spoke only the Venningized version of what she was learning to believe.

'That is because you have such faith in Charley's power,' said he.

'What would Charley say to your talk of the overwhelming of everything English?' she asked.

'He would be sulky, and perhaps he would be rude,' said Venning. 'Charley always thinks that his own ambitions can override the laws of Nature, and he is angry when you show your doubts. But he would have to agree if you could force him into argument. Go and ask him what has happened all through history to the people who have exalted some other ideal at the expense of national fitness. What happened to the Poles, who preferred maintaining their anarchic constitution to organizing themselves against their foes? What happened to the Dutch, who preferred their glorious State independence to the strengthening of the United Netherlands? And what is to happen to a country that prefers cheap food to Imperial unity, and cannot have an army equal to its needs because it will not bear the yoke of military service? It is not a question of the details of any policy. It is the spirit in which national problems are faced. The Poles had only one argument: "We will retain our veto." Similarly, our people cling to cheap food and personal liberty. The spirit is exactly the same. Remember, too, that when we went to war we hampered our generals by crying out to moderate the bloodshed. That is not a cry to come from a nation that will hold its own against a world in arms. The Poles had their Blakes and the Dutch had merchants as rich as St. Agnes, but they

were both crushed by nations that organized themselves as fighting machines, whether military or commercial. And we know very well that something is being organized against us also.'

It seemed to Alice that a cloud had cut off the warmth of the June sun. She almost shuddered.

'Certainly you draw a tragic background for Mr. Blake,' she murmured.

'Yes,' he answered bitterly. 'When the German machine is advancing to London, or pounding over his own Berkshire lands, or dealing the penultimate blow by taking the mouths of the Scheldt and the Maas, then we shall see what is the value of his gallant beauty. We shall also see the value of cheap food and glorious British freedom.'

'He will fight,' said Alice very softly, as she watched him in the field before her.

'Yes,' said Venning, 'fighting is in his breed, you see. I sometimes think that even Exeter Hall will fight when the great and terrible day comes. But it will be too late. The best scrap iron can't compete with a machine. When you think of the millions who earn their bread in that day, their ruin will be merely sad; but when you think of people like Blake, who have never known anything but the ease and lordship of life, and think that the ruin will be the same for them, it is tragic.'

'I have always thought,' said Alice, 'that the tragedy of the young aristocracy was that their position would be slowly taken from them by advancing socialism.'

'Believe me,' he answered, 'it is not that. When you go to places like Eton and Oxford and look at our *jeunesse dorée* sunning itself at ease, the tragedy is that those boys will have to go out before the armed foreigners in defence of a doomed land, and will be shot down. If you want to realize what I feel you must think of the boots of German soldiers tramping over Blake, handsome face and charming manners and all. That is the best that we have left to hope for the young lords of creation. It is honourable, if nothing else. That is why I find such a tragic interest when I see him unconsciously going for

protection to the one man among his contemporaries at Oxford who at least hopes and half believes that he can save him from his fate.'

'And that is what you meant,' said Alice, looking at him steadfastly, 'when you said there was a justification for my taking possession of his life.'

'Yes,' said he.

'It would be suitable, wouldn't it, if he came and helped with Charley's rifle club? That is what I want him to do.'

'What is Charley's rifle club?' asked Venning.

'He is going to start one among the working men at Cayle. He told me yesterday. He says he got the idea out of that old threepenny magazine we found in the cupboard and gave him to read.'

Venning laughed. It was just like Charley to be pleased by the ridiculous origin of his ideas.

'And what does he think his rifle club will do against the German army?'

'Nothing,' said Alice; 'but he says it may lead to something being done. In a country which has no Government, he says, you are bound to set to work in that sort of way. He wants to extend the club all over the country and into neighbouring towns.'

'I see,' said Venning, native scepticism sounding in his voice, and checking further talk.

Perhaps another side of the same great tragedy was represented as St. Agnes lounged out into the garden. It was easy to read of the kindly, easy, prosperous life he led. He was cool, even on a day like this. But he was pulling at his small moustache, and poring over a letter that displeased him. He joined them just as Blake brought up the champion of the village boys to receive a smile and some gooseberries from Alice.

They went in, all of them, to Brandon's room, for St. Agnes's letter was a disquieting political report written to him by the Dean of Cayle. The kernel of it, amid good many sentences showing resentment against Wilmoughby, was the news that Cooper had tightened his connection with the candidate. They were always to

gether. A number of new members had been added to the council of the Conservative and Unionist Association, and Willoughby, doubtless under Cooper's influence, was trying to conciliate the working-class vote.

'Our high-minded candidate,' wrote the Dean, 'does not seem to consider the democratic serpent such a loathsome beast now that its fangs have been drawn in the person of poor Charley.'

Of course, the Dean did not know of Cooper's request to St. Agnes to keep Brandon out of Cayle. St. Agnes was much distressed.

Brandon would express no opinion, for he was held in hesitation by an instinct which told him to do nothing and his reason, which urged him to return to Cayle. So there was one of those scenes so common in the history of his little party—the others in hot debate around a leader who lay still and smoked in silence. Venning urged him to go back to Cayle at once. St. Agnes agreed that if Cayle was not to be altogether abandoned, as he wished, the sooner they looked after their interests the better it would be. On the conduct of Cooper himself there were various views.

'The man's a traitor; he has sold you,' said Blake hotly, wishing that Alice would go out of the room, and leave him free to state his views more clearly. But Brandon would not agree.

'Mr. Cooper is not a man about whom you could come to any conclusion very quickly,' said Alice, who trusted him.

'He is always rather reticent and mysterious,' said St. Agnes, who at the bottom of his heart was fearing the worst. 'How would it be,' he suggested, speaking to Brandon, 'if you let me go up to Cayle, and find out what is really happening. You and Lady Alice can stay here.'

Brandon hesitated, dubiously contemplating St. Agnes in his rôle of diplomatic agent. That is one of the difficulties of managing a party.

'Let us get the Dean to do it for us,' said Alice, coming to her brother's rescue. 'He would create less suspicion.'

But there were objections, and the discussion wandered into lanes and by-roads, where Brandon was glad enough to let it stay. After dinner that night he fired their hearts by describing his plans for founding a rifle club. St. Agnes utterly abandoned the idea of his deserting Cayle. Venning offered his services as secretary during the months of the Oxford long vacation, for this unbeliever was ever willing to let Brandon have his fling. And Blake—while the eyes of Alice and Venning flashed a message—begged for leave to come and join the game. He paced the room in his excitement. He preferred taking Brandon's commission to working for the King's. Would his people make a fuss? Let his people go and hang themselves. There were justifications, as Alice and Venning knew.

'It's the best of all forms of volunteering,' said St. Agnes.

Brandon glared at him.

'It won't be a matter of volunteering at all,' he said. 'As soon as I find myself among the people of Cayle I shall take good care that it jolly well becomes a matter of conscription.'

## CHAPTER XVII

FIRST to the office, then to the Dean, then to Willoughby, and then to Cooper. That was the programme St. Agnes set himself on the first day after his return to Cayle.

July was half gone, and it was a week since the party at Brandon's bedside had been fluttered by the Dean's unwelcome letter. The previous evening, with his sister's help, he had laboured through directories and lists, discovering, among other things, the names of those who had subscribed to the People's Theatre. Well he remembered how he had assisted Brandon to unravel the finances of that stillborn institution on the occasion of returning the money to the donors. All who gave to that cause were among the number to be asked by St. Agnes to support the rifle club.

'Though it is quite unnecessary,' he had said to Brandon, 'I am perfectly willing to finance this show myself.'

But the far-away look came into Brandon's eyes; he said he wished everyone to be interested in his club. St. Agnes therefore prepared the circulars of appeal.

At his office he smoked a couple of cigars with his invaluable manager. Of his moneys he heard the fairest news. From the coal business, the mills, the Cayle land speculation, and the dealings of the stockbrokers in London, all reports were great and promising. He was asked to join in a new venture where the stakes were high. Tentatively he held out his veto, for hereditary caution had already formed like a crust round the dealings of his powerful house. The manager pleaded, foreshadowing enormous profits.

'I'm not fond of these rash ventures,' said St. Agnes.

But the loss would be nothing to him, the manager explained, and then, because he knew his man, he added : 'There's a keen Jewish brain behind it.' He mentioned the name. 'Men like that don't fail,' he said ; and St. Agnes yielded.

The most simple-minded person must feel at least some sense of comfort when he finds his feet pressing on firm ground. St. Agnes, as he left his office, could not avoid reflecting on the figure to be cut by Venning had he been faced by the manager, the books, and the speculations. What confusion even Charley had made with the finances of his poor theatre ! But to him they were an open chest of pleasures. His father always maintained that Eton and Christ Church need not necessarily mar a man of business, and the old fellow was right, by Jove ! It was a fine thing to have an old Tory for a father. Or was that a sentiment they would forbid him to embrace ? He was not sure.

A certain dreariness oppressed him when he contemplated the forthcoming interviews. In his programme they were earmarked as diplomatic, by which he meant that he would have to limit his freedom of speech by other checks as well as those which good breeding imposes. Also he wanted to get answers without asking direct questions. That was a thing very different from examining the books at the office. And what is diplomacy ? Business, as St. Agnes knew, has rules to guide one, though they are not to be followed blindly. What rules has diplomacy ? He had heard them discuss it in their chaffing way. Venning described diplomacy as the art of telling two big lies, and letting Nature do the rest, which Brandon declared to be only a refined extension of the ordinary principles of education. So the word 'education' was used in the party as a synonym. It was agreed that Cayle society would need a good deal of educating before it gave support to the rifle club with Brandon as chief officer. Only stern necessity induced them to employ St. Agnes as the teacher.

'And have you left Charley in Buckinghamshire ?' the Dean asked him.

'Yes,' said St. Agnes. The indifference of his tone was meant to show how little importance attached to Charley and his affairs.

'How is the leg? Does he make a good patient?' the Dean inquired.

'First-rate. You'd never believe how well he bears it all,' St. Agnes exclaimed, completely thrown off his guard by the smallest appeal to his emotions. He expatiated on details that only a mother should have noticed, till a shock of remembrance brought him back to caution. And, after all, there was no great danger, he reflected. The acutest person would hardly suspect that Brandon originated the idea of the rifle club merely because he could brush his teeth lying flat without letting the water run out of the corners of his mouth.

So he came to business, appealing to the Dean to give his name as a vice-president of the club. He was resolved to test the Dean before he disclosed the origin of the idea. He sharpened his prudence, rolled up his sleeves, and plunged his hands deep into the stiff subject.

The Dean's mouth was of that width which would lead a layman to drape a curtain of moustache well over both corners. There was space along its track for inserting quite enough amusement to please its cynical owner, while retaining solemnity sufficient to pacify any but the most penetrating bores. But the description of the rifle club proposal taxed its capacity. What the Dean heard was all about 'I' and 'my proposals,' 'my opinions,' 'my intentions,' 'the efforts to which, for my part, I have directed my thoughts, and mean to give my time.' No one would have recognised the self-effacing man of business, whose shrewd modesty had been a life-long talisman against the dangers of a big purse and a slow brain.

'So this is his latest, is it?' said the Dean, bringing down the whole edifice about St. Agnes's ears.

'Whose?' asked the diplomatist.

'Charley Brandon's.'

St. Agnes looked resentful, so did the Dean, but good-humour triumphed.

'My dear fellow, in another moment you would have taken me in completely. You stopped too soon.'

St. Agnes burst out laughing. The Dean explained that diplomatic methods, though always an intellectual treat, are not so attractive among friends as a trustful confidence. St. Agnes looked sorry and ashamed, the first really effective thing he had done.

'Well, upon my word,' he said, in a manner natural enough, 'in these days I don't know whom to trust and whom to suspect.' He told about the complication Cooper's strange conduct had brought in. 'And if you can throw any light on the matter, I want you to help me about it, Mr. Dean.'

St. Agnes was forgiven, for the Dean perceived that his deceitfulness was caused by nothing except a wish to try his hand at the unwonted work it had to do.

'I can throw no light on the matter,' he said rather gravely. He saw St. Agnes's face fall. 'I can give no explanations, throw no light,' he continued. 'But if you will accept an opinion and a suggestion, I say that I think Cooper is a thoroughly unscrupulous fellow, and I advise you to trust him implicitly.'

St. Agnes did his party the compliment to think that remark paradoxical, though, of course, it was not necessarily paradoxical at all.

'You seem to think that only a cherub is worthy to be trusted by the Brandonite party,' the Dean said, in answer to his puzzled laugh. But he checked himself, feeling that he might say things too hard for St. Agnes to bear. 'At any rate, I am not in Cooper's confidence,' he said.

With regard to the club, he promised everything required of him. His name was to appear as a vice-president on the circulars, and on the subscription-lists as a generous supporter. He made only the slightest demur.

'I am averse to participating in these venturesome undertakings as a rule.'

Whereat St. Agnes grinned with diplomatic glee, remembering his manager at the office.

'In this case there's a big man behind it,' he said. 'Charley doesn't fail.'

'The People's Theatre ?' said the Dean, smiling.

St. Agnes surrendered the point, and the Dean's glance fell to his clasped hands on his lap. He knew the weakness of that argument, for in the matter of the theatre it was the cause, not Brandon, that failed to score a profit.

'I will support his club,' he said, 'not because Charley is a big man, but because the older I grow the more I am charmed by what is young in other people. Charley is the youngest man I know. He is as young, his ideas are as romantic, he is as fresh, as a widow with seven daughters. He will always be the same.'

Which was the Dean's way of saying that he liked a sportsman.

St. Agnes, as he walked away, congratulated himself greatly that the Dean should have been, in the technical language of the party, captured. He had spoken of his love of youth, and St. Agnes knew the material value of this quality. Half a dozen and more of the youth of Cayle would lend their help to the club if the Dean could be brought to persuade them before it transpired that Brandon was the leader they were serving. The Dean had a way of talking to young men in rooms where rich merchants tended to ignore them, and his influence was great among them.

St. Agnes walked to the house of Willoughby, whom he proposed to probe and test before he went to Cooper. Several little incidents showed him the signs of the times. He met Miss Grainger, of the day-school, who made acid inquiries for Brandon.

'I always told him he would learn some day that it is better to be good than to be clever. There's nothing like a bed of sickness for teaching one that, and I hope he may be given grace to profit by the lesson.'

St. Agnes, from the depths of his simple faith, could have wrung her neck. Who was she to curse where Alice Brandon blessed ?

A business friend, bidding him welcome back to Cayle, observed that his connection with the Vitryfield exiles did him no good in the town.

'Come to me in a week's time, and tell me if you've had as many invitations as you had before you went down to Buckinghamshire. You'll be sorry for this some day.'

Mr. Upworth, standing in a group outside the club, verged on insolence.

'If you can't judge from his general record, you might at least judge him from his treatment of Worthing—first used and then thrown aside. I can tell you that if ever we want a successor to Willoughby, we shall go outside Brandon—and his friends.'

St. Agnes, towering over the little man, suppressed his anger for the sake of diplomacy.

'You need not trouble yourself,' he said. 'Brandon has no further interest in politics. Nor have I. I am turning my attention in another direction.'

It appeared that Mrs. Upworth had said that Alice would have to resign the presidency of the Needlework Guild and the District Nurses' League.

'And good riddance, in my opinion.'

'Then it will be good riddance to my sister, too,' said St. Agnes, 'and my subscription.'

Brandon had said that his friend knew nothing of the fierce joys of fighting. He was proving an apt learner.

He had in his pocket a piece of paper marked 'Agenda.' It eased his task to refer to this from time to time, for the paper was free from the smears and smudges which were left on his mental tablets by the unwonted commotion of his blood. The paper had no feeling as to Alice and Charley, no hatred of their enemies. It still pointed out clearly that the plan was to catch Willoughby and Cooper apart, and make each of them commit himself to support the club before they had time to form an alliance against it.

But, of course, when he went into Willoughby's room, there was Cooper sitting with him.

'I got back to Cayle last night,' said St. Agnes. 'I thought I'd come and see how things are going with you.'

'Very kind of you to take an interest,' said Willoughby, and thereupon he compressed his lips into a smile that lasted as long as St. Agnes's visit. It was the smile of one who stands with legs apart and hands behind his back, who has no mirth, no anger, nor even scorn, but triumph. It made St. Agnes quite unable to think out any reasoned plan of action.

As the violet to the crocus, so was Cooper to Willoughby. He never stood rigid or paced the room; he was always lounging in some attitude of uncommon gracefulness, with poetry in his eyes and humour on his lips, not one dark hair displaced. It was said that they were the two handsomest young men in Cayle. St. Agnes was sure that they were at least the greatest villains.

'So you have been putting new members on the council, I hear.'

'That is so,' said Willoughby.

'And I am very glad to hear that most of them are working men. You've changed your mind since we last discussed that question.'

'The inconsistency is purely superficial,' Willoughby replied. 'Both then and now I considered nothing but the interests of the party. That is the fundamental unity.'

'I think you might have waited till I came back. I am your president, after all,' said St. Agnes.

But Willoughby pointed out that St. Agnes had been otherwise engaged, a hit which passed unanswered.

'And so now you feel that things are going pretty well?'

Willoughby made no reply. To have spoken would have impaired the outline of his smile.

'Oh, swimmingly,' drawled Cooper.

St. Agnes rounded on him angrily.

'Since Brandon set them right,' he said.

It was hard to remain diplomatic, and harder still when

Willoughby had brought off another effective silence ; but St. Agnes pulled himself together, and fired off one of his diplomatic charges.

'Brandon has chucked politics now,' he said.

'I am sorry to hear it,' said Willoughby at once. 'I have done my best to impress upon him that if he would restrain his imprudences for a time I should be only too happy to do what I could to give him another start in politics later on. I told him that at our last interview.'

'At your last interview you behaved like a damned cad !' said St. Agnes.

For the memory of that interview rankled like a poisoned arrow. It was seldom mentioned, but every Brandonite kept it chained in his mind's inferno. St. Agnes threw aside diplomacy. Nothing on earth could make him ask patronage for the rifle club from the man who wore that smile, in the very room, perhaps, where he had insulted Brandon before the Mayor of Cayle.

'You may have acted cleverly on that occasion, and you may have acted stupidly. I'm sure I don't know which, nor do I care. But I've lived in the world some years longer than you, and I tell you that you behaved like a cad and a blackguard to a man who has more in his little finger than you have in your whole body. And it's a good thing you have someone to tell you the truth to your face.'

Willoughby's smile remained, with undiminished buoyancy.

Out of his profound respect for the opinion and advice of the Dean, St. Agnes so far trusted Cooper as to give him one of the draft copies of the rifle club circular, though he could not bring himself to speak about it. Then he departed, saying good-bye to Cooper only. Nor did he reflect that the outcome of this second diplomatic visit was to make an open enemy of the most powerful and influential of the youths of Cayle.

'He seems quite to understand his duties in keeping Brandon as a pet,' Cooper observed.

'As a pet?' said Willoughby.

'Yes; if you keep a dangerous dog you simply must swear at the people who complain of him.'

It could not be denied that Cooper was sometimes a trifle flippant. Willoughby, hinting a reproof in his voice, explained that St. Agnes was subject to a sad infatuation regarding Brandon. And here he displayed his singular gift for calling things by their right names. It was useless for Cooper to inquire in the humblest way when a pardonable affection becomes an infatuation. Willoughby could not explain it; he just knew it.

'Of course, I do not complain of his being friendly towards Brandon. 'Every man has a right to choose his own friends. You and I may not admire his taste, but we must not complain. But no one has a right to cherish an infatuation of this sort which leads him to behave in an ungentlemanly way to other people, as St. Agnes did just now. I must say I am very much disappointed in St. Agnes. I did not expect it. I should not have blamed him for saying that he liked Brandon, and was sorry for him—not at all; but to come here and use ungentlemanly language to you and me—— He is losing his sense of right and wrong, that is what it is. And when a man loses that he is in a very dangerous condition—very. I must say I am sorry for St. Agnes.'

It was often observed by Willoughby that when he had once summed up a situation, even among friends, no one ventured to impugn his conclusions. The most they dared to do was to make some provokingly crooked attack on an unimportant point in the argument, thus wholly evading the real issue. But not even this was attempted by Cooper. A clever arrangement of his knees and his cap enabled him to read St. Agnes's circular without appearing rude. He never appeared rude. By means of apt excuses he escaped from the house at once, without stopping for tea. He overtook St. Agnes on the road.

'About this rifle club. Have you seen Sir Benjamin Mason?' he asked him.

'No ; I was going there to-night.'

'On no account go there till after dinner. He sleeps before dinner now. You'll find him very sympathetic. He'll get it puffed in the *Advertiser*. Willoughby and I will give you all the help we can. The idea is a splendid one. Good-bye ; I'm off.'

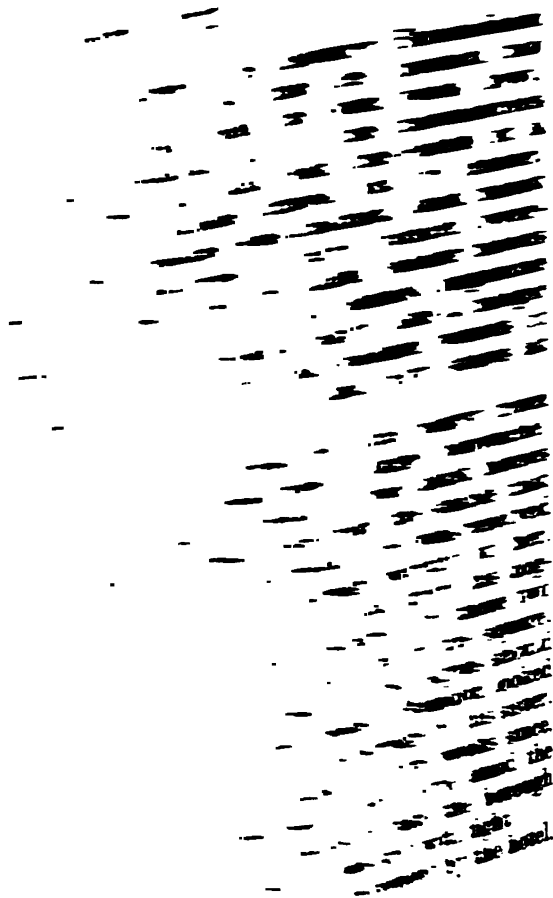
He smiled in his winning way, not looking like a traitor, and went strolling down a side road, a thoroughly unscrupulous fellow, whom one was implicitly to trust.

Again the Dean's advice prevailed, and St. Agnes did not see Sir Benjamin till after dinner. He dined at the club, thinking things over.

Sir Benjamin he found in perfect good-humour. Very little diplomacy was needed to discover what his attitude would be. His exalted mind, weakened by gout, perhaps, contained no relevant emotion but his dislike of Willoughby, and he regarded the proposed club accordingly. The club was Brandon's. Sir Benjamin seemed to jump to that with rapidity even greater than the Dean's. Consequently the club would be anti-Willoughby, and Sir Benjamin was, therefore, in favour of the club. He regarded his political heir with a healthy and orthodox hatred. His paper, moreover, the *Advertiser*, owed much to Brandon's position in Cayle. Since the *coup d'état* its circulation had increased thirty per cent. at the expense of its Liberal rival. It was at St. Agnes's disposal. He was directed to go to the editor with Sir Benjamin's authority, and the editor would publish about the club exactly what St. Agnes might suggest. And Willoughby would be annoyed.

St. Agnes went off in a state of exultation. He was certainly puzzled, for by several indications he was made to suspect that Cooper had been talking to Sir Benjamin since they met that afternoon. Still, what did Cooper matter ? The capture of the big Parliamentary and journalistic fish was a great enough event to drive the pranks of Cooper from one's head. It was a very cheerful letter that he sent to Buckinghamshire at the end of that tedious day.

Other letters followed, not less satisfactory. In his own way the man of business was doing his work effectively. The birth of the club was assured, the auspices bright, the prophets speaking the thing that was good. And in ten days' time went out a letter to Brandon to bid him return and take over the command.



standing with two sticks,' said Mrs. Russell to the Dean. 'It was just as they arrived. I did my best to show him what is the opinion of everyone but yourself.'

'And he?'

'Oh, you can be sure he played his part. He looked—well, dangerous.'

On the following morning the cat was officially let out of the bag by that invaluable ally the *Conservative Advertiser*, which adorned its placards and headed its chief column with the announcement: 'Lord Charles Brandon—Well Done—And Welcome Home.' It was in connection with the proposed rifle club—so read the public of this journal, thirty per cent. increased—that Brandon had returned. Doubtless the proposal was familiar to all readers; and as the *Advertiser* had puffed it vigorously for a week, the readers could not well deny this truth. Everyone would be glad to learn that this popular movement was to be headed by Lord Charles. And who more suitable? A committee had been formed, largely consisting, one was glad to learn, of working men. They would meet on Saturday, when Mr. St. Agnes would propose that Lord Charles be chosen president, with full powers of administration and command. This was to be done at the earnest suggestion of Sir Benjamin Mason, who was unfortunately not well enough to be present. One could only hope that the new Conservative candidate would follow his predecessor's example in supporting this admirable movement.

Surely, they thought, some force must have guided the editor's hand when those significant words were added to the string of Brandon's praises. They would twist the tail of the lion at Mowis Court, for if he countenanced the rifle club he would appear not only Brandon's colleague, but in a certain sense his follower.

The kind words of the *Advertiser* were accepted by Brandon with all the easy grace and enjoyment which marked his moments of prosperity. Service and admiration were so wholesome for his constitution that even the ushers of the private school and the standardized youths of Oxford would have admitted him to be temporarily

right-minded. His devil was absent, and his house seemed swept and garnished. Thus, had his leg allowed him, he would have made a fourth in the game of tennis. Blake was playing on the lawn of the hotel with Sir Benjamin's two grandsons. In the company of their little sisters he ate strawberries and cream with a natural zest that must have satisfied the strictest modern Pharisee fighting for conformity. He was, indeed, all that a young man should be following the traditions of the elders.

Those were pleasant days on the lawn beneath the chestnut-tree. They had the charm of physical and political convalescence, friendliness, and sunshine. Painting their picture, one would put Alice at the tea-table; Charlotte St. Agnes, perhaps beside her, bandying nonsense with Brandon, who lay in flannelled slackness on his couch. Blake would be sitting cross-legged on the grass mocking Venning's last pronouncement. There would be St. Agnes, not less happy for knowing that his was the horn of plenty which poured out careless luxury upon them. Perhaps, across the lawn, the Dean was coming up to join them, bringing news of some person who had promised to help the club. Or it would be Dusky Williams, extravagantly petted, with his daily list of those who were to be recruits. There was nothing hostile, nothing out of tune.

In his seat beneath the chestnut-tree the leader did not feel the shocks of lightning that his friends conducted safe to earth. Why should they tell him? But of course they found the heavens charged with anti-Brandonism, and many a forked flash hurtled through St. Agnes or the Dean and others of the party working for the club. They might have written, in collaboration, a pamphlet on unpopularity. There was the blunt hatred of Mr. Worthing, who lifted his hands, and exclaimed: 'God may forgive him; I never can.' That was a natural and respectable resentment; no one could blame the man who felt it. Mr. Upworth based his refusal to help the club on reasons one degree less good. 'A man who has once betrayed his friends will betray them again.' That, too, must be pardoned, for it was merely one of

the generalizations so often heard from the uneducated. But then we come to the subtler manifestations. 'I disapprove of young men who don't take up any profession. When I was young I was made to,' said a merchant approached by St. Agnes. 'I can't stand these Etonians,' said his son. For which reasons they both refused to help the club. If anyone supposes he could crush these arguments by argument, let him begin with the lady who announced that when she and Brandon were both staying at Carraway he was late for breakfast every morning. 'Indeed!' said the Dean, not realizing at once how pertinent was the objection. 'Yes,' said she; and it was understood that the club could expect no help from her. 'If he wants help from me let him learn to behave like a gentleman.' And this again: 'He says he likes Browning. If he wants me to work with him let him drop that beastly affectation.' 'He came to luncheon at our place when he was a boy of twelve, and drank wine. That shows the sort of man he is.' There was also the class of objectors who did not need to examine Brandon's soul to find reasons for refusing. 'I won't have anything to do with the club if that man is going to boss it.' 'And why not?' 'Oh, look at him: he walks about with his hands in his pockets and slouches.' Or this, spoken in tones of unassailable finality: 'I could never work with a man who wears those waistcoats.' From all of this it appears how strong is the tendency of the human mind to explain the most intangible antipathy in terms of what is concrete. It is not considered nice to open a wide mouth and scream 'I hate him!'

The day of the inaugural meeting came, and, looking back upon it, they could not but regard it as the beginning of an epoch. For most of us there is an element, an atmosphere, where we become what the world in necessary ignorance must think to be our true selves. All our circles seem to become concentric, and those who know us say that they have seen the real man, that this is how they must ever picture and remember us. Thus, it is to be observed of many people that if a piece of unorthodox conduct is held to their noses, they will snatch up the

bricks of reprobation, and build themselves a little throne, whereon to sit judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and all with such a natural ease and grace that the true man is plainly seen to be a grand inquisitor. Thus is every artist transported in the presence of his art. The friends of Brandon were Conservatives, and he had called himself a Liberal. In their opposing camp they had not known him as a party leader. But once they caught his outlines in that rôle, once they felt the touches of his art, he was for them a party leader, whether he stood or walked, or ate or slept.

They saw it from the moment when he limped into the schoolyard and joined the group of people waiting for the meeting. His moodiness rolled off. The sunniest enjoyment took its place. He seemed to know all names and faces, to remember the history of each man. Of the thirty who were present, excepting his immediate followers, just under twenty were men of the working class, men of influence, some of them of loyalty proved in the past. The rest were persons of position in the town society. Young men were plentiful, as always where Brandon or the Dean had influence in the choice.

'Hullo, Billy!' said Brandon to the half-resentful son of a banker. 'Do you know Mr. Ridge? Fifteen years ago the best toffee in Cayle grew in Mr. Ridge's pockets. Do you still keep toffee, Ridge?' And he joined the shy youth to the garrulous grocer, on whose arm he had been leaning, and passed on to further greetings.

A retired Colonel cocked an eyeglass at him.

'I gave that message to the fellow who runs the lads' brigade,' he said.

Brandon had no recollection of any message; doubtless it was the doing of his friends.

'And what did he say?' he asked.

'Oh, he's one of these parsons, and he don't like the idea of the club, not at all. He won't encourage his boys to join.'

'So much the worse for the lads' brigade,' said Brandon, making up his mind that he would one day wring a different answer from that parson. 'Do you hear

that, Beesley ?' he said, taking a burly publican by the arm. 'Colonel Smith says those lads' brigade chaps are down on our club.' He left the two men to discuss the point together.

Those whose love was quickened by intelligence were soon aware of a policy beneath his genial activity. He was mingling the upper and lower classes. So Venning and Alice threw themselves into the same work, and the Dean singled out the dissenters.

Brandon grasped an old sergeant by the coat.

What do you mean by not getting rid of that rheumatism ? I tell you what it is, you old glutton—it's sugar. You must take a pledge against sugar. It's sugar that fills our firesides with rheumatic people, and our gaols with criminals. Now tell me how it is.'

You would have thought that rheumatism was the one topic that he found entrancing. Next day it would be 'Oh, damn his rheumatism !' But the old man did not hear that, while he heard the sympathy most clearly.

'It's not acting,' said Alice to Venning as they watched him whispering some joke, perhaps profane, very close to the face of a delighted young mechanic ; 'not even he could act so well as that. It's simply another side of himself. He's enjoying it as much as they are.'

They went into the schoolroom, where they performed with due ceremony and perfect harmony the business of inauguration. Officers were chosen, the form of the badge was determined, the presidency of Brandon was proposed and welcomed, and his name appended to the title of the club. Last of all came the president's address, whereby, though he waved no flags and sang no patriotic songs, he sent them home convinced in brain and heart that, in spite of manifest and deadly perils, it is a good thing to be an Englishman.

'He is one of the few men I have known,' the Dean remarked to Venning as they left, 'who dares to talk to working men without trying to be funny.'

The meeting was breaking up with the same good-humour as began it, when St. Agnes brought up a business friend to Brandon.

'Charley, I don't think you've met my friend Mr. Brown.'

The quick blue eyes of Brandon's present mood ran over Mr. Brown, and he recalled a name of budding influence in Cayle.

'It's very good of you to come here,' he said.

'I'm glad to be of any help,' said the merchant. 'I like your ideas. This club's a fine thing. I always encourage what gives healthy amusement to the people.'

Alice was waiting for him in the carriage, but in spite of expostulations, he said he would go home on foot.

'Mr. Brown will give me an arm.'

St. Agnes feared for his leg, Venning for Mr. Brown's patience, but, as Alice said, it was useless to rebuke him. He went off with his new friend, leaning hard and talking harder.

'When I see the peasants of France,' said Mr. Brown, 'amusing themselves so light-heartedly, and think of my own countrymen slouching round street corners, I feel ashamed.'

'Do you?' said Brandon, eagerly sympathetic. 'And when I see the peasants of Germany arming themselves so steadily, and my own countrymen talking about the curse of militarism, I feel ashamed too. That's why I started this club. It's a beginning.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Brown, scenting trouble, 'I'm not in favour of anything like conscription. Conscription isn't suitable for this country'—an argument, of course, which disposes of the whole question as though it had never been. How familiar was the path of that discussion to become! Brandon, in a few weeks, could have conducted it in his sleep had it not been for the adaptations it required in each particular case. Mr. Brown was a fighting Tory, ready to shiver and shake when he heard the views of the Bishop. For such as he the Bishop was a useful *hors d'œuvre*. Peace and brotherhood, stuff and nonsense, had an oily bitterness that whetted his appetite for what was coming. The day of small nations had gone by, he agreed, or said. We live in an omnivorous age, an age of mighty empires. In future if the lamb lies down

it will be in the lion's stomach ; there is no other place for him. God help England if she lose her navy ! In the navy was Mr. Brown's horn exalted. Britannia must rule the waves, and you can't rule the waves with an army.

Only yesterday had Brandon told the Dean that Trafalgar was won at the Heights of Abraham and at Plassey.

'We want a navy, we want commerce, and we want education,' said Mr. Brown ; 'but we don't want an army—except for India, of course.'

'And the trouble is,' said Brandon, 'that without an army we can't keep any of the other three.' For he thought it was time to strike.

Mr. Brown inquired sympathetically what his meaning could be. And then the old story was told again, with a backward glance at history and a forward glance across the decades and the centuries, till the present seemed but a point of time, with position but no magnitude, and the streets of Cayle were but a speck in the great world around them. Navy, army, trade, wealth were battered to pulp, and showed to be only the gelatinous shapes in which we see the manifestations of power. Germany was but a convenient instance, a temporary example of the ever-present rival types fighting together for the prize of life. Mr. Brown was breathless, verging from perturbation to assent, and not a little flattered.

'That's all very fine,' he said, 'and I dare say it's all very true ; but we've got to cut our coat to suit our cloth, and when you ask for a great army I answer that there are very serious difficulties in the way.'

'Exactly,' said Brandon. 'It's devilish difficult to support life at all on this planet now. I quite agree ; so would that crossing-sweeper chap over there ; so would Austria or Turkey, or any other dying country. But shall we live with difficulty or die in peace ? That's the question. The Bishop of Cayle says die in peace, because peace is virtue and difficulties are wicked.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Brown in some indignation, 'I'm not one of your peace-at-any-price men. I'm a fighter. I've always said : " My country, right or wrong ! "'

'Of course you have,' said Brandon enthusiastically.

'And when the hungry Germans ask for our navy and our colonies, you'll tell them to be damned.'

'Certainly, certainly. I'd take up a gun myself,' said Mr. Brown, enkindled.

'And when they ask for Holland and Belgium in order that they may make a fleet to come and bag what we won't hand over,' said Brandon, 'when the French say, "Come and help us to stop Germany gobbling up all Europe," will you take up your gun then?'

'If you are right—if you are right, I would most certainly,' said he.

'And a damned lot of use you'd be,' said Brandon, his voice dropping from its eager pitch, 'if you'd never learned to shoot.'

They were at the door of the hotel.

'Will you dine with us some day?' Brandon asked him.

'Next Wednesday?'

The big fish looked for an instant at what he knew to be a hook, and gulped it down.

'I shall be most pleased,' he said.

'A bottle of fiz inside you,' thought Brandon as they parted, 'and you're mine.'

Slowly and thoughtfully he limped across the big doormats, and up the four steps to the hall. There were little groups of people waiting for dinner, sitting on the red plush sofas round the walls, and one of the groups was his. He saw that they were talking eagerly. Dusky was there, red with pleasure and excitement. Venning was rattling off some humorous description that amused the Dean. St. Agnes added touches of his own. Blake had something bubbling on his lips waiting its chance. What were the two smiling strangers thinking as they watched them from across the hall? At least they must see that these were men who shared some keen enjoyment. That was what Brandon marked. They were men who had brought off a success, and, what was more than that, they found in their success a source of unity and common joy. The Brandonite party delighted in its work. It had no internal politics to disintegrate its force or its enjoyment except what laughter healed.

But Brandon turned off to the left, and made his way to their private rooms. He had something inside him which needed to be let out in words, and the sympathy he wanted was Alice's.

She was sitting in her room, a bedroom to which she had managed to give the air of a boudoir. Here she had established, pathetically enough, such of her possessions as had survived the wreck of her home. She sat in the one comfortable chair, and through the window it seemed that she saw a vision of things that were gravely satisfactory. Brandon, in his rough way, sat heavily on the arm of her chair, and he too was inclined to look at visions through the window. So he lit a cigarette, and she mocked him for his overbearing treatment of Mr. Brown, and they were boy and girl again. Then they told the visions that each saw.

To Alice it was the brightest day since they had left home. Now at last they were at work on the task before them, and the future glistened with hope. A path of sober delectable work stretched out in front of them. How much more happy were they than Willoughby, who was to have a seat in Parliament!

Brandon readily agreed. When he went into Parliament, as of course he would, he would have behind him two, three, four years of work that no man could disapprove of. He would represent, not only a constituency, but an idea that people could actually understand. He would be member for the rifle clubs. Who knew how wide a constituency that might grow to be? He and the world would have a common dialect, a means of communicating by use of which he could preach to them the Brandonite ideas. Taken by itself the club was nothing.

'Oh, but it is,' she said. 'It will—it will keep us out of mischief.'

They laughed. She was a poor creature, as Brandon told her, except when he was shaking her. And then he told her his own vision.

'The cleverest man alive can't see more than a quarter of what is going on under his nose. There are more

things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in the rifle club committee.'

'What is it? Have you some new idea?' asked Alice.

He said that he had no new idea, but let her not allow the rifle club to loom too large.

'But you will carry it through, Charley,' she pleaded.

'Oh, promise me not to go off on a new idea. Think what we have suffered from new ideas.'

'I'm just experienced enough not to trust to experience,' he said. 'I tell you what it is, Alice: we'll carry this job through. But I shouldn't be surprised any day if something turned up which took most of our interest away from it.'

'What will it be?' she asked, full of a painful anxiety.

'I've no idea,' he said.

'And when did you first have this feeling?'

'It came to me,' he confessed, 'at the moment when I first saw that the club was going to be a success.'

He was incorrigible.

## CHAPTER XIX

AMONG the advantages to be derived from an intimate acquaintance with the Holy Writ is the power of giving adequate expression to one's outraged rectitude. It is from the Bible that we learn to say, 'Thou hast a devil.' Such was the inspiration that enabled Miss Grainger, the schoolmistress, to write her sulphurous letter to the sister of Brandon when asked to give help to the Nurses' Club. She knew—who better?—how to address a friend of publicans and sinners.

'I can't understand what has come to Charley,' said Alice, as she eased her wrath by showing this letter to Venning. 'Six months ago it would have roused him to epigrams and fury, now he just mutters "Damn!" and gives it back without another word. He even laughs!'

They were standing on the path outside the windows of their rooms waiting for the others to come to dinner.

'His mind is given up now to something greater than personal rancour,' said Venning with a gravity that made Alice take a lighter tone. She was keenly aware that they had not dined. She laughed.

'No; the fact is, we are spoiling him. He lives in such an atmosphere of admiration that his amiability is becoming insufferable. It used to be only spasmodic, and now it has grown chronic. That Mr. Brown who dined here yesterday, he ended by calling him his eye-opener. When a man hears that from all sides there's no hope of his remaining a misanthrope.'

'I am very glad of it,' said Venning. 'I am going to ask you to help me to turn it to account in rather an important matter.'

They had worked hard all day with correspondence and interviews, and Alice had thought that politics were laid aside. But Venning's earnest manner bore her down.

'I want to bring about a reconciliation with Henry Willoughby,' said he.

Alice lowered her eyes. A hardness came into her face and voice. It seemed that an atmosphere of admiration did not affect her as it affected Brandon.

'With Henry Willoughby!' she said.

'What is there to keep them apart?' said Venning. 'They have no conflicting interests. They are both men of intelligence. It is clear by now that our club is going to be a great success. And the Conservative cause is going to succeed, too. But a union between Charley and Willoughby would benefit both the club and the party. I know the Dean thinks there is some mysterious reason why they can't be friends, but he won't say what it is, and for my part I can't believe in it. I know Willoughby as well as anyone.'

'There is an ancient barrier,' said Alice.

'But it is a barrier of purely personal hostility,' Venning objected, 'unworthy of Charley. Everything else seems so clear; it is only the matter of Willoughby that remains obscure and uncertain. We don't seem to know where we stand.'

'That,' said Alice slowly, 'is because Charley doesn't know his own mind. You, Mr. Venning, are very cautious, and Charley is rash and daring. Yet your mind is quicker than his because you face every problem you meet. He never faces a problem until he is forced. When he is forced by events, or by an irritation inside him, then he decides, but not before. I will prove it to you. I will ask him about Willoughby, and you shall see what he does.'

Her promise was slow of fulfilment, however, for while they were dawdling through dinner Brandon would do nothing but enthusiastically discuss a proposal for producing 'Hamlet' with a cast of Cayle residents exclusively. For the part of Polonius the competition

was terrific. It was agreed to put it in commission, have six Polonii, and divide his choice sayings among them. Mr. Upworth should be one. So beautiful is the economy of Nature that even the most insignificant and apparently useless of creatures may serve for a sauce to give relish to a homely meal.

But afterwards, in the room they used as a smoking-room, which had been supplied with leather chairs and sofas, Alice seized her chance. Some sort of embroidery she had, a substitute for smoking, and conversation dozed. Brandon was lying on a sofa by the window, his fair head comfortably ruffled by a cushion, cigar-ash dropping on his shirt, a very restful warrior.

'I wonder,' said she, 'if Henry Willoughby is going to help us with the club or not?'

Immediately the knots came out on Brandon's forehead.

'I'm sure I don't care,' he said. He had no idea that he was being put through his tricks like a poodle.

Venning stated his views; Blake hotly argued on the other side, and Brandon gazed out of the open French window, looking now cross, now puzzled, sometimes jerking out a nervous laugh. He would give no opinion. Venning with his eyes acknowledged Alice to be right: there was no opinion to be given.

'If we could capture him,' said he, 'it would be as good as capturing the Delphic oracle.'

'The Delphic oracle had the merit of being cryptic,' Alice objected. 'Henry is so distressingly lucid.'

'At any rate, his lucidity is under the most perfect control,' said Venning. 'We should try to get a hand on his steering gear.'

From Brandon came an intimation that Willoughby as a topic rather bored him. Had they seen into the weeks of the future they would have known that Willoughby as a topic and as a present fact had come to stay.

Blake, who on sitting down made choice as a rule of the grass or the floor or the window-sill, was perched for the moment on the head of Brandon's sofa, and by

the accident of this position it fell to him to light the squib. It fell to him to introduce to the sanctum of the inmost party privacy the new element, the grand intriguer, the man who was fashioned in the still smoking workshop of the Italian renaissance, whose coming was near at hand. 'Fights to the fearless, goals to the eager,' says the song—and drama to the dramatic.

Brandon pulled his coat.

'There's someone listening outside the window,' he whispered.

In an instant Blake was at the window, his nostril quivering for a fight.

'Who are you?' he cried; and past him, into the room, walked Cooper, cool as the air of night from which he came.

He shook hands with Alice, and was introduced to Blake and Venning. His name did not surprise them. It was not wonderful that this eavesdropper should be the traitor, the man who sat in Willoughby's pocket, and thence wrote letters of counsel to St. Agnes. Venning bowed stiffly; Blake strained at the leash of civility. What checked them was either the unperturbed bearing of the offender himself, or the instinctive knowledge that this man was somehow under Brandon's protection.

'Have a cigar,' said Brandon, who was seldom surprised by anything.

To Blake this was equivalent to a command that he should hold out the box of cigars which lay on the table beside him. He watched ruefully as Cooper lighted it. A man who has lighted your cigar is not a man you can kick out of the room unless he perpetrates some further outrage.

Cooper took off the coat he wore, and disclosed the faultless evening dress beneath. He sat down by the window. There was a pause, rather prolonged.

'I wonder if you noticed what a particularly fine creeper we have outside the window,' said Alice.

'An ampelopsis, I believe,' said Cooper.

'Yes,' said Alice.

There was another pause.

'I believe the moon does not rise till after twelve to-night,' said Alice.

'Not before that,' said Cooper.

It seemed as if Brandon was asleep. Cooper, unembarrassed, wore a smile of the gentlest amusement. He showed no desire to follow Alice's frigid conversational leads, but she persisted.

'I hope you did not wet your feet on the grass. The dew is heavy.'

'Oh, thanks—scarcely at all.'

Only Brandon understood that the man was waiting to be left alone with him. He was idly wondering how to engineer it. Indeed, had Blake perceived it, it is doubtful if he would have consented, even under orders, to leave his chief with a traitor. A very delicious thing it is to have your strong man crippled in your care. It stimulates imagination, and suggests delightful dangers. Blake bristled with protection. Yet, as Venning had once said, he was a better sportsman than the little bullying boys at school.

Brandon lay considering tactics. He might have saved himself that trouble. The governing principle was that of Cooper's entrance—drama for the dramatic. The solution was as dramatic as Cooper could have wished.

It was a standing grievance with them all that the hotel servants were given to bringing visitors to their rooms without warning. They had pleaded against this, in English and in German, unsuccessfully. And never was the besetting sin committed with more brilliance than now.

The door was thrown open, and a buttoned boy announced the name of Mr. Henry Willoughby.

All heads jerked round to the door. They rose—Alice, Venning, Blake—and stood with backs arched and bristling fur. They were learning to be patient under personal injuries, this party, but they were far as yet from tolerating injuries to one another. Brandon alone lay still, and he alone saw Cooper dart behind the curtain of the window at his side.

So the gas of intrigue generated quickly. Brandon,

perforce, inhaled it. He called sharply for Blake, and whispered in his ear to tell the others not to mention Cooper.

Indeed, it was hardly necessary. As they stood in front of Willoughby it did not seem that they would soon be chattering about the gossip of the last half-hour. The onus of the talk was severely left to him. Introductions were not needed. Venning and Blake had been known to him at Oxford.

'I am lucky in finding you at home,' he said to Alice.

'We have been dining at home,' said she, from a face of marble.

Willoughby advanced to Brandon's sofa. The two men shook hands.

'I was very sorry to hear of your accident,' said Willoughby, trying to be genial under conditions so depressing.

Brandon laughed.

'It was my first spill,' he said.

'And I am afraid your recovery is not so quick as we could hope.'

'I've had a touch of rheumatism, I believe,' said Brandon.

There was nothing but good-nature in his voice. He had no wish to spar with Willoughby, yet his amusement was mixed with a certain vengeful pride when he saw his protecting watch-dog Blake, his Oxford warrior, take a position at the head of his sofa. Blake looked about as amiable as a piece of vertical *chevaux de frise*. Others might forget the last meeting of Willoughby and Brandon, but not he.

So it was with Alice, to whom Willoughby turned in deference to her sex. With buoyant *empressement* he strove to draw out her eyes from beneath the dark lashes of hostility.

'How was it that the accident happened?' he asked her.

'He ran into a terrier pup,' she said, measuring her civility by the inch.

She was standing by the fireplace, and watching the reflection of the lamplight in the jewels of her rings.

'Dear me, dear me!' said Willoughby. 'It is provoking to think how the meanest of creatures may endanger one's whole career.'

'Yes,' said Alice, looking at him quickly, and revealing even to him the comparison that his words suggested.

Then she was sorry, for he was visibly embarrassed. Nor did Brandon make things better when he innocently quoted :

'The man recovered from the bite;  
The dog it was that died.'

With tolerable graciousness she asked him about his family and the campaign.

They gave him a chair, near to Brandon, who began to wonder how long Cooper must remain a prisoner. Presently he would suggest their going to another room.

The others, too, were wondering about Cooper, debating with eyes and whispers behind the back of Willoughby. Where was he? Had he hidden, or escaped out of the window? How many more spies were to visit them that night? Why was one spy so anxious to avoid the other? Was there good faith among spies? The same thought occurred to all of them, and their dislike of Cooper made way for a kindling excitement.

Then, with some pomp and circumstance, Willoughby unwrapped the cause of his visit. He did not in the least realize what inflammable matter it contained. He said he proposed to offer his active help to the rifle club.

So Brandon, in an instant, was called on to decide a question whose importance he realized only too acutely. Was Willoughby to be welcomed or repelled? This was not a case where he could answer: 'I will write to you to-morrow.'

He drew the shawl a little higher on his legs and swore below his breath. There was no doubt about his being taken by surprise. Willoughby, perhaps, enjoyed it. Alice and Venning had their own reasons for opening

eyes of expectation. Blake looked down on Willoughby in scorn unspeakable. It is to be feared he did not realize that this, after all, was the most powerful young man in Cayle.

How and whence a man decides such questions—and they come to everyone, even in lives far better mapped than Brandon's—it is hard to say, for the inquiry dangles over one of psychology's deep pools. Of thought, at the immediate moment, there is none, for thought must balance probabilities, must sift and qualify, and time does not permit. Whether from chance or genius, the decision is a plunge. It is said there is a poet in us all, and perhaps there is a genius of action, too. After all, every pure guess is a stroke of genius, good or bad. The best guesser, it may be, is he whose memory, like slumbering embers, throws up a sudden flame, recalling unembodied musings of the past and unconsidered facts.

Brandon had just a minute's grace, while Willoughby declaimed his praises of the club, his sympathy with the working classes of this realm, his wish to see all Cayle united in one fold. But that moment he spent in cursing the inconvenience of his position. If only there had been time to learn what Cooper meant!

Should he even now make some desperate evasion? He might say something was wrong with his leg, or have a fit, or anything but appear to want to think the matter over. But no; from somewhere the decision had arrived.

'There isn't anyone whose help I should value more,' he said, speaking slowly, as the others hung upon his words; 'but I can't help thinking it would be a bad thing to mix up the club with politics.'

'But my personal help——' cried Willoughby.

'Wherever you go, there inevitably politics go with you,' said Brandon. 'That's the worst of your position. I'm awfully sorry, but I really think we'd better keep separate at present.'

So saying, he pleased no one—not Willoughby or Venning, for he declined the alliance which each from

his own standpoint wanted ; not Blake or Alice, for his manner was too friendly.

Still, with unabated interest they listened while the argument continued. They heard Willoughby pleading for what he evidently wanted greatly.

'Why should politics be regarded as unclean ?' he asked. It had been his steady effort to raise them above suspicion. Even if the club were regarded as pure charity, what was the aim of charity if not the welfare of the people ? The politician's aim was identical. Of course, there were politicians and politicians, but he trusted no one would consider him to be a self-seeker. How could the club suffer by being connected with a cause as noble as itself ? And so on. They realized with glee that Willoughby was bringing up the heavy guns of morals. The effectiveness of artillery varies with the objective. This was Willoughby's artillery. Was it a hundred-pounder or a pop-gun ? Looking at the stricken drawing-rooms of Cayle, it would have seemed the former ; looking at Brandon on his sofa, it was apparently the latter. How moral was Cayle, to be dominated by bullets of cork ! How callous Brandon, to withstand the heavy shells !

'The fact is,' he said, 'you're afraid the club will be used as an anti-Willoughby organization.'

This was repudiated utterly. Willoughby was not such a coward ; Brandon could not be so base. Either reason would have been sufficient.

'We may as well understand each other,' Brandon told him, speaking with frankness and good-nature. 'My influence with the lower classes is useful to your campaign, and your influence with the middle classes is necessary to my club. I really believe it would be a bad thing to have an open alliance. But we'd be fools to quarrel. So long as you are Tory candidate you're pretty sure to get the votes of my friends. Let's leave it at that.'

And what more did Willoughby want ?

'We needn't fall on one another's necks, you know,' said Brandon, smiling ; 'but so long as we're each neces-

sary to the other, we shall each score by letting the other live in peace. It's no good flashing your dagger till you've got the other man by the beard. We'll put off our little differences till then. Perhaps when the opportunity comes, we shan't want to take it.'

'That's it,' said Willoughby. 'Peace is always the result of mutual trust.'

Brandon opened his eyes.

'Peace is the result of being strong,' he said.

Willoughby answered jocosely :

'Then take care I don't get stronger than you.'

'Yes,' said Brandon quietly, 'and you must do the same.'

Thus was concluded a treaty memorable in Cayle. Had its last clause been observed, it might have stood for ever.

'I came off even better than I had hoped,' Willoughby remarked to his father in a moment of filial candour. 'I get his influence in the club, and I avoid the contamination of an open union. Indeed, I can congratulate myself.'

'Splendid, splendid !' said the flattered parent.

'You wouldn't have known him, father. He behaved in a perfectly gentlemanly way. He has improved wonderfully since the day I told him what I thought of him. That's the way to treat a man like Charley Brandon. A cut with the whip does wonders. I should like to treat his friends in the same way. There was a marked difference between their manner and his.'

'And you got the best of the bargain,' said his father, wrapped in admiration at the thought.

But there he overstepped his mark.

'That's not quite how I should choose to put it,' Willoughby replied, restoring their normal positions by one touch. 'Brandon will not work against me, because he does not dare. As he said, I am too strong. As for his club, it is an excellent institution, and I do not think it would be right for me to offer it the least discouragement. Good-night, father.'

And he left him, the better for a lesson which should

not be forgotten by commercial parents having righteous offspring.

'A blasted ranting hypocrite!' said Blake, as he stood with Venning at the hotel door, watching the visitor depart.

'You hate him, Dicky?'

'I do. Don't you?'

'Yes, I suppose I do,' Venning answered. 'He defiles the most beautiful things in life by taking the language of virtue and idealism as a garment for twaddle. It is the unforgiveable sin—blasphemy against what is holy—which causes other men to stumble. It is men like him who have almost—not quite, but almost—made Charley a slave of vice. But Charley is seeing through it now.'

'Damn the man!' said Blake.

Alice joined them. Excitement was crowded in her eyes. She recalled the evening's unsolved problems.

'Cooper! Where was Cooper?'

'He was behind the curtain all the time,' she said. 'Charley knew it. He is with him now. We are not to go back till Charley sends for us.'

'What does it mean?'

What, indeed? At any rate, it was not well to offer guesses, for guesses might lead to comments, and the comments might conflict with the fiat of the chief.

'I told you he would decide the question about Henry Willoughby when it was necessary,' said Alice.

Venning only hoped the decision was a right one.

'He will make it right,' said she. 'If it doesn't fit in with things as they are, things will have to change to suit it.'

'He hedged,' said Venning. 'He never really did decide.'

'Oh, but he did,' said Alice. 'I saw the moment when he made up his mind. I saw it in his eye.'

They sat on one of the red plush sofas in the hall, ordered iced drinks, and wondered again what was passing in the smoking-room. Venning waved his hand in that direction.

'Lady Alice, the keyhole is the privilege of your a  
'So is patience,' said she; and again they talk  
Willoughby, sure that on that subject they might  
their present minds and fear no future retractations.

Once, in the romance of history, lived a man of abilities. His heart was large and warm, his preju few, his military talents very eminent. But around the world surged fiercer than it has surged before or a and in such a world he had not the skill and coolne battle by himself. History teems with such men of second rank who stood alone and failed. Their talents were their snare and ruin. But this man, Ma Antonius, did what is seldom done by any of the sec rank. He yielded to another his claim to leaders He, a Roman general, made humble by some ma wrapped up his pride in a devoted loyalty and ser to the greatest and noblest of his fellow-men. To any who knows how hard it is in all societies for the sec rank to save itself by recognising the pre-eminence the first, the figure of Antonius must have an inter that is almost staggering. In an age of militarism was a general. In an age of license he was a prince debauchees. In an age of violence he was a mas ruffian. And yet, in the heat of youth, he let himself ruled and ordered and rebuked by a middle-aged stat man, whom by desertion he could have brought half-w to ruin, and the service that he gave him was true throu nights of black danger, days of maddening triumph, ev when excitement was about to change to humdrum, a again when treason suggested an escape from ruin th the wisest heads predicted. In later life the same spi of humility brought this man to grief when he gave l service to the Mary Stuart of his times. But his failt does not strip him of the merit of his one great strol so rare in the second rank.

Perhaps there was one day in Rome or Gaul an int view between Cæsar and Antonius like that which rous the curiosity of Alice, Blake, and Venning. If so, o may imagine the great passionate Roman vowing o his soul in a way that was beyond the reach of Cooper.

Cooper sat where Willoughby had sat, and he answered Brandon's short-sighted stare with the same cool smile and mild attentiveness that had comforted for weeks past Brandon's prosperous rival.

The times these two had met could be counted on the fingers of one hand, the sentences they had exchanged might be found in any book of German conversation; but they were about to plunge into a talk as intimate and naked as any that can pass between man and man. It was not a miracle. Friendships are not caused by the accident of birth or dwelling, for every friendship worthy of the name is an accomplished fact before the friends have set eyes on one another. These men were specialists in enmities and friendships. It was not wonderful that when they met they quickly ratified what Nature had ordained.

A thin tissue of mystery was between them, that was all. For form's sake, Cooper must say that he was not the traitor Brandon's friends had thought him. He crossed his legs, and leant back on the clouds of repose.

'I couldn't come in by the ordinary way,' he said; 'it was too risky. And if Willoughby had seen me here it would have ruined me.'

Brandon nodded assent, and continued his attentive stare.

'I owe you all sorts of explanations,' Cooper said.

'Oh, never mind them,' said Brandon.

'But I must. It's not only your room that I have entered in an unconventional way. I've entered your life too, and I must make my confession. Do you understand about it? Do you see what I've been at?'

Surely that was asking Brandon to give away more than Cooper had a right to claim. The explanation must obviously come from Cooper. Yet he, too, was in difficulty until Brandon should have let him have one peep behind the curtain of his mind.

'I see you've been playing a funny game,' said Brandon in reply.

Cooper made a move to obtain the desired peep.

'Yes,' he said, 'it's a funny game. The reason why

I came here to-night was because I thought it about time to pass the ball to you. I was in luck, too. I have seen you give it the cleverest kick it has ever received.'

'What was that ?' asked Brandon.

'Why, your treatment of Willoughby ; it was as clever as the idea of the club itself was brilliant.'

'Oh, I couldn't run the risk of Willoughby going and cursing the club,' said Brandon, slackening the strain of his attention. 'I had to conciliate him somehow.'

There was no doubt that Brandon carried the honours of that little piece of dialogue. He had not let Cooper snatch one glimpse behind his curtain, while Cooper, in making the attempt, had drawn aside his own completely. Brandon's forehead became smooth. He put his cigar back into his mouth. He was satisfied Cooper was no fool, and Cooper said his treatment of Willoughby was brilliantly clever. It could not be the flattery that was clever. That could have been done by anyone. The clever thing was that Willoughby had been made to stand aloof. And why was it clever ? There was only one reason : it was clever because it left the way still open for the club to turn on Willoughby and rend him. If Cooper understood this, as Brandon was sure he did, it gave the plainest indication as to what was his view of Brandon's policy, and of the nature of the goal to which, as he said, Brandon and he were kicking the ball in harmony.

Such was the logical deduction, and even this was weak in comparison with the volume of his instinctive conviction that Cooper had no part with Willoughby, but was, and had always been, his own man. He perceived that this conviction had possessed him ever since Cooper's name had first appeared in the game. It had been the source of several unaccountable decisions he had made, as well as of his late treatment of Henry Willoughby.

Knowing this, he felt it needful to say something that should clear the atmosphere for Cooper, as it had been cleared for him. That was only fair.

'The club could give Willoughby a devilish awkward kick if it chose to organize against him,' he said.

'Yes,' said Cooper, 'I have always thought the club a peculiarly brilliant idea.'

'Nevertheless,' said Brandon quietly, 'the club will not attack Willoughby unless Willoughby attacks the club. That attack was not my motive in starting it.'

'We won't waste time discussing motives; only fools do that,' said Cooper, to whom Brandon's last remark had given an unpleasant shock.

'By Jove! you talk our lingo,' Brandon murmured in admiration. 'But look here: I've got this club, which is my hobby, and for the sake of the club I've climbed a damned long way up the greasy pole of respectability. I'm not going to come a cropper now by making a wanton attack on Willoughby. Of course, I always saw the connection between Willoughby and the club. I'm not a fool. I knew that twenty shillings make a pound. But it was the shillings I wanted, not the pound. I'll not attack Willoughby until it's either necessary or safe. At present it's neither.'

'I assure you,' Cooper answered, 'he is vulnerable, more vulnerable than you can have any idea of.'

'Is he? What have you been doing to him all this time? Tell me that. That's what I want to know.'

There was moisture sparkling in Cooper's eyes as he replied. For this great moment he had waited long, though his sense of humour did not leave him.

'I've had a most interesting time,' he drawled. 'I've been a spectator at your game for longer than you think, and when I saw Willoughby trampling on you when you were down, the sight was so fascinating, the interest so acute, that I thought I would step over the ropes, and join the game myself for a bit. You're not the only man who has a hobby.'

'Good God!' murmured Brandon.

'It became my hobby to back the side of the man who was down, and to see that the gifted youth who kicked him as he lay should not be sent to Parliament as member for Cayle. It's really a most interesting hobby. In pursuing it I have found out more about Willoughby and his prospects than he knows himself. My informa-

tion is at your disposal. As I said, motives are immaterial; all that matters is the intention. And it is my intention to reduce my friend Willoughby to that insignificance for which Nature has designed him, and to see you member for Cayle before the year is out.'

'My God!' cried Brandon, in extreme excitement, 'we'll win. I've been right—I've been right all along. We've got the game in our hands.'

'We'll win the seat,' said Cooper. 'You shall be member, and your club shall be an army.'

'Oh, damn the seat!' said Brandon. 'Damn the club! Don't you see what it is? It's the sea-breeze blowing up the valley. What made you take the odds against a broken horse? What makes these men of mine chuck up careers and prospects to help me? What makes St. Agnes shell out thousands for my club? What made me jump over a cliff to escape from the Liberal party? It's the breeze that's going to be a hurricane; it makes us mad. You chaps don't know what you're about; nor did I. But it's the same madness that has caught us all. By God! when I look back and think, the best of the few good men I've known had got it, and there was no one to tell them what it was. It's the smell of blood, and they are itching to be armed, and they don't know what it is they want. I see it now. I always knew you weren't a man who'd be a pal of Willoughby's and go against me. It's written in your face. I remembered your damned indifferent manner, and I told myself you wouldn't be an enemy of mine, because you were a sportsman. But I see it all clear now. You've got the madness of the game in your blood. Every man who isn't a fool is bound to be on our side. If he's not it's a ruddy freak of Nature. God! if the occasion doesn't make the man, it makes the party. Think of us twenty years ago in our cradles, with that destiny which has brought us all together. There must be a lot more for us to find. But I'm so damned glad you joined us of your own accord. It's the best thing that has happened.'

Now Cooper, reeling under love, was much surprised to be welcomed only as a sign of the times. Moreover,

he had a great deal to say. He had not climbed over the garden wall to discuss the spirit of the age.

'Incidentally,' he began, 'you may be interested to learn that there is a conspiracy to chuck out Willoughby, and put you in his place.'

That was direct enough to act as a douche of cold water on Brandon's blazing excitement. He pricked up his ears, and was practical again.

'Is there?' he said. 'Is that the explanation of what has been happening?'

'Willoughby is sitting on a volcano,' said Cooper. 'I am packing the council of the Association with men who are pledged in secret to turn him out, and put you in his place as candidate. Out of forty members I can count more or less safely on ten. That is how we stand.'

'The devil!' said Brandon.

'And now I want your help.'

'Tell me—tell me how you've done it. Who are your men?'

So Cooper told his dirty story—clearly, modestly, humorously, in gentle tones, smoking serenely, like a man whose days are passed in cushioned ease, his nights in the stalls of the theatres. It was the story of one whose head was as cool as his heart was warm, who betrayed a fool that he might serve a friend.

'Good Lord! you're a pretty villain,' Brandon said.

'The moral aspect is certainly interesting,' said Cooper.

'There'll be time enough to discuss that later.'

'Have you thought what you'll look like when this comes out?' asked Brandon.

'Oh yes; people will say I'm a sad instance of the results of consorting with you.'

Brandon laughed.

'But the question is,' said Cooper, 'will you take up the cards as I've arranged them, and play the hand? The council is a body that consists of many different sections, divided by political tendencies and personal prejudices, with all sorts of cross divisions. A master hand might arrange them so as to give us a battle and a victory, without anyone suspecting how we worked to get it.'

For my part, I've done my best. But my methods are detailed and small. If you will give your mind to it, we may find the great line and we may win.'

'And if we fail,' said Brandon, 'we are ruined. I have a past, and if I come a second cropper such as this would be, there'd be an end of my career.'

'It's for you to judge,' said Cooper. 'When I heard you talking to Willoughby, I thought you had seen through it all. You took exactly the right line with him.'

'I always play for possibilities,' said Brandon.

His mind was sinking into thought. It is one thing to play for possibilities; it is something quite different to commit one's self to one. He could not but see that what he might gain was inconsiderable when compared with the ruin that would come with failure. Yet Cayle was the home of his working men, the birthplace of his club, the metropolis of the clubs that were to be. To represent Cayle would be an advantage not to be despised. From no other seat would his voice sound so weighty or carry so far.

'I cannot possibly settle this until I've thought it over,' he said. 'Damn it! I must get on a horse again. I can't think in this hole.'

'But the moral aspect,' said Cooper. 'You'll tell me at least that you've no moral objections.'

Brandon laughed rather unpleasantly.

'Oh, certainly,' he said. 'On that score my objections are purely æsthetic. Hitting below the belt is never pretty, is it?'

Cooper assented, reminding himself that this was the man who sold the Liberals. But Brandon added a bitter dictum which had to justify both past and future, Cooper's and his own.

'The luxury of behaving like gentlemen is rather beyond our means.'

'And it's beyond the means of this damned country,' he added.

It was clear that he was passing quickly to the shades of thought, and Cooper for a few moments sat still, employed in criticism. This critic marked one thing that

turned him sad. He had come to Brandon, who badly wanted men, and exulted in acquiring one. He had offered body and soul, asking no price ; yet Brandon was scarcely even gracious. So little sense had he of favours yet to come that he neglected to insure them by the cheapest of expedients—by gratitude. Cooper had heard from many Brandonites of the singular charm of their leader. He had seen him patting Dusky Williams' shoulder, greeting St. Agnes in the streets. From him, it seemed, these favours were withheld.

He said that he must go, and got up from his chair. How was he going ? By the wall. He dared not risk walking through the hall of the hotel.

'You'll never get up the wall from this side,' said Brandon.

'It's the only side available,' he drawled. 'But I shall manage it all right—I shall, really.'

'I'll come and see you over,' said Brandon, getting off the sofa.

It was not an easy thing to use the leg after it had lain still for so long. Cooper knew it. He saw the little knots again on Brandon's forehead, and observed the savage tones in which the offending limb was cursed.

'Here, give me an arm. This leg of mine——'

'Don't come,' Cooper urged. 'It isn't necessary.'

But Brandon would. It was only the first few steps that hurt, he said.

They walked across the lawn, Brandon speaking eagerly in hushed tones.

'Lord ! what a night ! One night is worth a dozen days. Don't you think so ? Don't you think so ?'

There was something in his voice or in his pressing arm as they walked together in the living secrecy of night, that wakened Cooper's senses by a flash to what was stronger than diplomacy, better than gratitude, sweeter than flattery. It was companionship. He ceased to envy those whom Brandon flattered. He was admitted to the party by that sentence about the night.

'Can I come again to-morrow at the same time ? We've got a lot to talk about.'

'Yes, yes,' said Brandon; 'I'll expect you then.'

With assistance Cooper reached the top of the wall. He sat there, one leg on each side, prospecting the safety and secrecy of the descent. Brandon stood watching from the lawn. Then, whether he remembered the trick of Dusky and the youths of Cayle, or whether he merely wished to give a silent sign of parting, he raised his hand in mock military salute, and let himself down out of view.

Brandon went to bed without letting the others catch him. And a stranger would have said that he was both tired and cross. The mind which he meant to apply to the problems raised that night was the mind of a lonely horseman riding next day on the hills.

But Cooper, beneath the stars, could not thus postpone his meditations. For two-and-twenty years he had approached this night, for another sixty he might march away from it; but it would remain the night of his life. How, from a distance, he had watched the greatness he had seen laid bare this night! How impatiently he had looked around him at the little friendships of the past and present! There, on the island over the lake, was the castle of Brandon in the moonbeams of romance, and he, a man without a boat, had paced the tedious shore. But now his feet had touched the soil of the island. He had looked through the windows of the castle, and the draw-bridge had descended, actually at this first visit, to admit him as a friend within the desired place. Then, if his lips had trembled to watch the splendour from afar, what did he feel like when he saw and touched it from within? This was the greatest moment he had known. He came from the presence of Brandon, and the scales were lifted from his eyes so that he saw his own soul face to face. When such a mood assails a level, calculating man, there will be strange events to follow.

## CHAPTER XX

WHEN Blake next morning went to Brandon's room to pull him and his news from bed, he found he was too late. Already Brandon had risen, breakfasted, and dressed, and the people of the hotel, well used to the unusual, reported that he had ordered his horse and ridden none knew where. It is just this kind of unexpected action that rouses the common run of household gods to fury. The middle classes claim an abstract right not to be taken by surprise. You can, in fact, take almost any liberty with them, jog any prejudice, if only you avoid surprising them. But it is difficult. Ideas that come too suddenly are like guests who arrive by telegraph: they put the house out. Dinner was ordered for the home circle only; cook will be annoyed. And if a member of the family be found in bed when he is usually out of it, or out of it when they expect him to be in it, the shock of surprise becomes a shock of horror such as Brandon had long given to Cayle.

But the socialist Brandonite party kept a large clear space of individualism. They left one another alone, accepted the normality of the abnormal. They had no resentment or surprise when their leader did an unusual or inconsiderate thing. They could accept as natural his ride through the cool of morning to the hills; and it was well they had that power, for they were to be asked that day to accept as participators the ride of Cooper through treachery to peril.

Alice was the first to catch the scent. She was walking home to tea, after hiring a room for the first of the lectures on military nursing, when she saw her brother walking his horse up the High Street to the square.

But it was not the Charley who ate strawberries on the lawn in flannel clothes amid a prosperous party's loyalty. Her own dark eyes grew soft as she watched him. He was looking, not at her, nor any present thing, but at events. Yet she did not perceive in his gaze the misty blue that reflects the illimitable future. Rather were his eyes cocked for an enterprise close at hand, an enemy who stood ready down the street across the square. And his lips were drawn into a sensitive sternness that had bidden fear depart. When had she seen him thus? thought Alice. It was when he stood by a marble pillar in the hall at Vitryfield ready to start for the famous meeting, with his career in his hands. Her blood quickened as she followed him.

He might have kept his counsel till he was so far committed to Cooper's enterprise that his friends had no choice but to acquiesce or to desert him at a crisis. That, however, was not his mood. He told them all about it even before he gave Cooper his consent; and they, three types of Brandonites, acquiesced.

First, Blake. What could he do but acquiesce? He had acquiesced ever since, a little boy at Eton, Brandon pulled him out of one great scrape and plunged him in a dozen more. This much he owed to the man who had shown him that a sportsman may find life outside the cricket-field and billiard-room. They had held together all these years, through places how tight, with loyalty how true, none knew but they themselves. Though the oaks in his father's park might give him shelter one degree less kindly after this, he could not look at Brandon and refuse. Honourable prejudices were not to be upheld at such a cost. He had a past of his own, with a tradition of loyalty stronger than the traditions of his fathers. This is the compact between lord and man, which they had not broken. The man shall have protection, the lord shall have his way.

Alice, too, acquiesced. When Blake, criticising Cooper, said, 'It's pretty thick,' she sent him a look of gratitude. It was another gutter to cross, and as she stood at the brink she noticed a curious thing in Brandon, remem-

bering how much of tolerance and little of resentment he had shown when Willoughby trampled on him. She saw that now he regarded him with hatred. How like him, and how little inconsistent! His passions always came and went like this, at the bidding of his genius. While anger was useless he had none. Now that it was needed as stimulus and inspiration to brace him in the time of danger, from the storehouse within him there came such a bitterness of hatred as he seemed ashamed to acknowledge. Such men have no need to be actors. When the tones of an organ change from soft to fierce, it is not that the organ acts a part; its natural breath produced both sounds alike, though governed by mechanical stops. For the first time in her life, as Alice saw the flint in her brother's face, pitiless, fearless, and lawless, she was sorry for his rival. He did not look a pleasant adversary. She remembered Willoughby's buoyant confidence of last night, and she could have shuddered. But for herself, though the way was through the mire, it was the way of her life. It had its smooth places and its rough. They would come through, she knew, to the honourable fields again. It was Brandon's way, and, as she was beginning to learn, it was the way of Brandon's cause.

Someone asked how Rupert St. Agnes would like it.

'Leave him to me,' said Brandon. 'I'll take him for a ride, and tell him all about it.'

They had no doubt as to what would happen to poor Rupert's prejudices all alone on the bare downs with Brandon. They would be smothered by the sheer force of tremendous argumentation.

It was Venning, the expert in justification, who surprised them. He said not a word to help the scheme to wriggle through the moral test, nor a word to impede it. He played with his eyeglass, without interest in the topic. It was from a purely prudential standpoint that he directed his dislike of Cooper's plot, and thence he had everyone against him. He discoursed on the absence of certainty, the many ways in which the scheme could miscarry, the fearful disaster that must follow on dis-

closures. Blake told him he was not a sportsman, and it happened for once that Blake struck the innermost truth. Venning was too sane. He was too good a mathematician to make those brilliant errors that are the secret of success. Again and again they added up their seven mystic sevens ; but while Venning made them forty-nine, Brandon made them fifty.

They were not surprised that Venning should hold back from the terrible risks of Cooper's undertaking. What was wonderful was that he should so lightly pass by the moral deformity of a man who had lived like Willoughby's brother that he might the better lure him to destruction.

Some days later Venning explained his reasons. It happened that Dusky Williams had carried Blake away to represent his chief at a smoking-concert to be held in what used to be called the Liberal Club. It was now the Working Men's Club. Blake went off in high spirits, and Brandon, Alice, and Venning were left to spend the evening together.

Conversation turned on the attitude of certain of the clergy who opposed the rifle club. This stirred the bitterest anger of Brandon, who held that the clergy had a special duty to support him in that matter.

'But think,' said Alice, 'what they would be supporting. Whatever the club was originally, we have turned it into a mere weapon to use against Henry Willoughby. The clergy have shown an instinctive cleverness in keeping clear of it. It saves them from being connected with what is a little too low even for us to be quite happy about, you know.'

Then Venning startled her by taking up big cudgels in defence of Cooper. He saw no reason why it was not sheer absurdity to brand as low or shady or immoral what was done for political reasons. A politician who will only do what is honest would be like a barrister who would only argue what he believed to be true, or a doctor who would attend no patients except regular communicants. He would be foredoomed to failure. No politician can succeed unless he is willing to be cleverer than his opponents, to succeed at their expense, and to sacrifice every-

thing to success. Otherwise, he is voluntarily engaging in a race that he is bound to lose, which is absurd.

'No,' he said; 'the difficulty is not in justifying the dishonest acts of politicians. What is difficult is to justify political life at all.'

'Hullo,' said Brandon, 'you are climbing up to the position of the Bishop of Cayle.'

Venning answered sharply:

'I have not heard that you ever proved the Bishop to be wrong.'

Already they were at a place where the air was more thin than Alice cared to breathe.

'Surely,' she said, 'you put it much too strongly. Everyone knows that politics are necessary. We couldn't live without them. Practical people don't guide themselves by those ultimate philosophic positions, moral or immoral. Don't you think we ought to be able to observe the rules of decency in politics as easily as we can respect the white flag in war?'

'Really, it is not possible,' said Venning sadly. 'How often have you heard Charley say that politics are only a branch of biology? He is perfectly right. And if the Bishop were here I expect we could make him agree that politics must necessarily be either a branch of biology or a branch of morality. Either you must put yourself outside the struggle for existence or you must take part in it. With persons and with nations it is all the same, the same as it is with the various types of plants and beasts. You always have them reproducing themselves too fast for the world to support them all; then come the eternal laws of variation and selection, and the stronger type flourishes, while the weaker goes to the wall. The moment you admit morality you admit forbearance, and those who forbear must inevitably be crushed by those who do not. It may be right to take part in the struggle, or it may be wrong; but it cannot be right to take part with only half your strength, for then you fail to attain either perfect morality or perfect success. It may be wrong for England to have a big navy, but it would be equally wrong to have a small navy, because it would still be meant to

injure others. The right thing would be to have no navy at all. No nation and no person can succeed except at the expense of some other nation or person who might have had the good things they have got, and if you are going to injure someone else, you may as well do it thoroughly. It is useless to compromise with God.'

'Because you can't cheat him,' said Brandon.

Alice, between horror and amazement at these views, exclaimed :

'But what is to happen to religion ?'

'What is to happen to politics ?' Venning replied.

And there the matter might have rested, for they were on ground well explored in many an Oxford evening ; but Alice had several reasons for advancing. She was curious, and she was a little shocked. For the first time she felt herself becoming a stranger amid the leather arm-chairs and the atmosphere of smoke and whisky. She would fight for her position, her right to partnership. She had the vague suspicion which most people entertain towards a philosophic standpoint that seems to stultify experience, and she wondered, pitting herself against the sad-faced Venning, which side her brother would assist.

She had been used to call herself a Christian, yet she could not subscribe to Venning's *reductio ad absurdum*. She was sure there was somewhere a way of escape. Though a novice, her quick mind found weapons.

Was not Christianity a thing of the spirit ? After all, what had it to do with wars and Darwinism ? The Prince of Peace was the Prince of spiritual peace, not the Prince of arbitration treaties, as the Bishop thought.

'There must be a way of reconciling Christianity with everyday life—there must be ; there is bound to be.'

'I should like to say so, too,' said Venning. 'But beware of intellectual dishonesty.'

'What is that ?' said Alice.

'When you have beliefs based on instinct and you pretend to yourself that they are based on reason,' said Venning—'that is intellectual dishonesty.'

He maintained that from Christianity the chain of logic

could lead to nothing but the application of universal altruism.

'And it is with that knowledge,' he said, 'that we in this party have to make our peace with God.'

He spoke solemnly, and Brandon was never more proud of his sister than at that moment. Small indeed would have been the fault in a female controversialist had she turned on Venning to ask how he could share in the politics of their party if he truly wished to make his peace with God, and on such narrow terms. But Alice did no such thing. She revered the sorrows of the philosopher.

'But it seems to me,' she said, 'that the principle of Christianity doesn't in the least impede the struggle among nations or among men. It teaches that death and pain are not real evils. It places religion as a thing between the spirit of God and the spirit of the individual. It imposes no rules of conduct. Christ Himself was a man of war, fighting the ideals that He hated. And think, beggars were starving while Christ feasted.'

'If,' said Venning, 'by pressing a button you could send the German fleet to the bottom of the sea, could you, thinking of the pain and loss and bereaved parents and widows and children—could you press the button on Christian principles?'

'Yes,' said Alice; 'I believe I could.'

'Basing your Christianity on the spirit of the Gospels?'

'Yes,' said Alice.

'Then, that is intellectually dishonest,' Venning answered, 'for you certainly can't defend the position logically.'

At this point Brandon strode across Alice's body.

'Whoever would be fool enough to defend a religious position logically?' he said. 'No religion can be proved logically; you know that perfectly well. It's a matter of faith. A rational religious belief is a contradiction in terms.'

Venning, roused to enthusiasm, answered him at length.

'That's true enough ultimately, but only ultimately. You must choose your ultimate belief by an act of faith,

and from that you must trace your morality by rules logic. If you justify blowing up the German fleet, and if you are unable to trace that logically up to Christian principles, you are obliged to trace it up to some other principles till you reach an independent ultimate belief. By that method you could multiply inconsistencies to any extent. You could have a hundred different religions all at once. It is nonsense. You are only entitled to one ultimate, and from that you must work down logically. Otherwise your religion becomes a mere sanction for convenience, a mere peg on which to hang inconsistent prejudices. You become like dons and schoolmasters, who try to base their absurd rules and principles on the teaching of Christianity, violating all logic and good faith. Repudiate Christianity if you like——'

'But I don't,' said Alice.

'Great heavens, no!' said Brandon. The fervour of his tones surprised them. 'I tell you what it is,' he said. 'We call ourselves nationalists, and we've got a nationalist movement; but unless we can get our nationalism sanctioned by religion, we're dished.'

It was for that reason that he was so much disheartened by the opposition of the peace-loving clergy to his rifles. But it was rather a shock to Venning and Alice to have the discussion as abruptly switched on to lines of pure expediency.

'If you want sanction from religion,' said Venning, 'you must first choose what religion it is to be, and then you must accept the logical consequences of your choice.'

'And for my part I choose Christianity,' said Alice.

Venning held up a warning finger, like a governess.

'Christianity won't do for Charley,' he said. 'Not if I am right in my test case about the German fleet and the electric button. What he wants is a religion of patriotism, like the Shintoism of the Japanese.'

'But Shintoism is not a religion in itself,' said Brandon. 'It is only a colour which any given religion may take on. Christianity has done it before now, and could do it again. The horrors of an invasion would make even the Bishop a Shinto. And I tell you we've got to do it; it is absolutely

vital. Unless we can do that, every particle of our policy is wasted.'

Whether this was the cry of the seeker after religious truth or the apostle of expediency, it was strange to see how the fire came into the eyes of the conspirator, the man who had staked his career on the quivering chances of an intrigue against an enemy who stood in the way of his personal advancement. There is no particular psychological generalization that meets such a case.

But Venning sought to bring back the discussion to the lines where he and Alice had started it. A religion that would 'take on colours,' Shintoist or other, was not the religion by which he could make his peace with God.

'You may Shintoize Christianity well enough to satisfy an excited populace,' he said, 'but I defy you to satisfy me, or yourself either.'

Brandon was silent.

'You and Lady Alice are each attempting a different impossibility,' he continued. 'You are trying to Christianize your Shintoism, and she is trying to Shintoize her Christianity. But both of you are trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. Christianity is based on altruism, and Shintoism, together with your nationalism, is based on Darwinism. You will never reconcile the practice of Darwinism with the theory of altruism.'

'We must,' said Brandon simply.

'Then we shall be the greatest philosophers that ever lived,' said Venning.

Brandon answered that perhaps it might be so.

'And until we have achieved the feat?' said Venning.

'Until then,' said Brandon, 'I shall act and talk as if we had achieved it.'

But Venning suggested that the cruel philosophers might pounce on the Shinto creed, prove the incompatibility, and expose the fraud.

'Give me an invasion,' said Brandon, 'or a big war, or even a general appreciation of the ambitions of other nations, and then, while you are still trying to reconcile Shintoism and altruism, I'll have the reconciliation ranted from every pulpit and purred at every Dorcas meeting,

and the cruel philosophers can go and hang themselves.'

'But what about ourselves?' cried Venning again. 'What is the good of this reconciliation to us if we can't find a logical proof to make it satisfy our own intelligence?'

They remembered that Venning would not approve of Cooper's plot, because there was no logical proof that it could be reconciled with assured success. And Blake had said that he was not a sportsman. It was the same Venning then and now.

'For my part,' said Brandon, 'I shall be like the dons and schoolmasters. I shall follow my instincts—prejudices, if you like—and let consistency and proof be damned.'

'My God!' said Venning, 'how I envy you!'

He mixed himself a whisky-and-soda sadly, and remembered how often he had envied his friend before.

'I think,' said Alice afterwards to Brandon, 'that Mr. Venning rather makes me despise philosophers.'

'But you mustn't,' Brandon told her. 'If he hadn't been a philosopher he would never have got over the elementary prejudices that prevent men from joining our party.'

'But he has got over much too many prejudices,' said Alice. 'He has even got over the prejudice in favour of common-sense. If he goes on, it may end in his leaving us.'

'Don't you be afraid,' said Brandon. 'He'll not leave us till he's sure we're wrong, and he won't be sure of that till he has discovered the ultimate truth of everything. That's what he'll hunt for all his life; but he'll never find it, so we're all right.'

Many times when Alice saw him sad she reflected on the meaning of that hunt. Its pathos caught her sympathy, and quieted contempt.

'I suppose you and Charley always end with the same difference when you talk philosophy?' she said to him.

'Yes,' he answered, 'because Charley cares for action more than for truth.'

'Yet he is something of a philosopher,' she said.

'He is something of a philosopher,' Venning answered, 'because he is something of everything. He is fierce, tender, daring, timid, reflective, impulsive, energetic, indolent. That is how men of action are made.'

'And can't a philosopher have all those qualities?' she asked.

Venning sadly agreed.

'But the philosopher can't resist the temptation to control them,' he said. 'What the man of action can't resist is the temptation to let them control him.'

## CHAPTER XXI

THIS narrative, like Cayle and the political world in general, has a holiday in August. Persons of consequence went out of town, as is usual, and Cayle was given up to the working classes—and to Brandon. He and his friends spared only ten days for a yachting cruise with St. Agnes ; for the rest of the month the work of the rifle club engaged them. They cast their lines for fishes that weighed more than trout ; the bird they marked was bigger, stronger on the wing, than grouse.

With September the provincial world returned, and the roll of events continued ; and whoever on the middle Sunday of the month had made his after-luncheon walk in the direction of the Long Meadow, where the town merges eastward into dales and downs, could read the palpable record of that which had passed in the history of Cayle while he and his had dozed in the sunshine of Weston-super-Mare or Llandudno. The event was visible there. The rifle club was on its legs.

That the Brandonite party should have dared to do good on the Sabbath Day, anxious as they were to conciliate the middle class, was an index of phenomenal progress. They had actually called their men from Bible-classes and street corners to a weekly practice meeting held on Sunday. Could assurance go further ? One thing it proved—that the popularity of the club had risen so far from the lower to the middle and upper classes, that the leaders felt able to withstand a very considerable shock. Brandon could never have done this by himself. If prejudice yielded such a material point it was the doing of the Dean, St. Agnes, the Mason

family, and others who were traitors in the camp of respectability.

The Dean was present—a very important officer, for every man stood bareheaded while he opened the afternoon with prayer. Men wondered as they saw the lawless Brandon standing, cap in hand, beside the priest. Expressions chased one another across his animated, nervous face, and they wondered how he liked it.

The day was fine. It seemed that the whole town was in the meadow. The women were there, too, and it was not hard to see how fair eyes scorned and fair lips jeered if a man went by who did not wear the badge. Brandon had said his club should be recruited by conscription, and if public opinion is as strong as law, his boast was being literally justified. There were four parallel lines of fire. Four men in command stood with their groups of marksmen, noting in a book each time the exciting news was signalled from the targets. Everywhere was emulation, praise, mirth, enjoyment, though the Bishop in his text that morning warned the town of Cayle that those who take the sword shall perish by the sword. It is apparently a fearful thing to perish by the sword.

Along the line of marksmen, carrying backwards and forwards the warmth of their distinguished praise and interest, went the group that surrounded Brandon. It was a show day, and he had not less than two score people with him. There was Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, explaining this and that to strangers with the aid of her expert knowledge and a dark red parasol, altogether swollen with a proprietary air that could not be resented in one who had stood by Brandon in days as dark as this was bright. There was the Dean, still holding his Prayer-Book, firing the enthusiasm of the Tory Countess who had brought her husband ten miles in a motor-car to see the show. There was Alice, shedding glory on that rising Mr. Brown, whose capture had been completed by a bottle of champagne. St. Agnes, infantile with happiness, gilded the hours for a little band of tradesmen; and did they not know the difference between a real gentleman and their own fat Mayor? If St. Agnes were not Mayor of Cayle

next year, they would know the reason why. If he said once that Willoughby was at fault to be absent on that day, he said it a dozen times. Blake also was there, with a group of schoolboys, on this last Sunday of the holidays. Happy schoolboys! too young to know that Oxford disapproved of Brandon, too greatly dazzled by his glory and his kindness to remember that he could not throw a ball. To be treated as equals is as charming to the young as it is maddening to the middle-aged. Venning, with his problems still unsolved, was passing his painless rapier through the expiring prejudices of two parsons, while a troop of retired Colonels, merchants, residents, trod the grass around them.

In the midst of all was Brandon, playing the part in a knickerbocker suit, and attempting with a pair of field-glasses and a knotted brow to cheat the infirmity he could not be prevailed upon to ease with spectacles. On one side of him was Sir Benjamin's grandson and heir, a Harrow monitor, battling with one of his cigars. The day was marked for him by Brandon's having dropped the formal 'Mason' for the flattering 'Benny.' At his other side was the florid Earl who came in the motor-car. He lived in a little town, and was a magnate of their county. At half-past three he became a promised member of the club committee; at four there was nothing to content him but a branch to be started at his home. Half an hour later he refused to move in the matter till Brandon and his friends came over to stay a week, and bring their auspices to help him. And he shook the hands of the hundred rising marksmen whom Brandon here and there presented to him.

Ginger-beer and buns were to be had for a penny at the stall, but the sympathy of the leader and his friends was to be had for the asking. They had learned their lesson, could reach their followers without stooping, and barter that best sympathy that is devoid of condescension, degrading neither him that gives nor him that takes. The breeze that blew from Cayle had no scent of what anger and hostility might lurk there, nor was there in the light-hearted eagerness of Brandon the appearance

of a player whose fortune is staked upon an undertaking red with risk.

Here was a man who had passed the first test, and was ripe to exchange his bronze badge for silver. His officer reported as Brandon and his group arrived, and Dusky Williams had the silver badges in his pocket, ready for these crises.

'What happens to the bronze one?' Brandon asked him, as he gave him his reward of prowess.

The man grinned; he did not know—nobody knew. Everyone within three yards felt himself to be in a delightful conspiracy with Brandon to settle this important point over the heads of the committee.

'I tell you what it shall be,' said he. 'You keep it, and it is a point of honour with you to find a man who isn't a member yet, and make him take it from you and join.'

That settled it, and made a precedent.

'Here,' said Brandon, 'here's Lord Westshire. He's not a member yet. Give it to him.'

The Earl accepted it amid laughter and applause, and Brandon took his arm to lead him on to another group; but Dusky Williams stopped him.

'My lord, here's Ellis. He wants to speak to you.'

Brandon turned round. The man who stood there was his own groom, and a bit of a mystery lurked in his eye.

'Mr. Cooper sent you this note, my lord,' he whispered. 'I've got the horse waiting in the road.'

Immediately from Brandon's mind the fabric of the rifle club vanished like a fairy castle, with its gaiety, interest, pride, promise, and excitement. He said good-bye to no one; they could think what they liked. Cooper did not send for him at inconvenient times for nothing. He walked off quickly to the road that skirted the meadow and took his horse from the boy who held it.

'Come at once. I shall be waiting at the King of Prussia on the Camley Road.—R. C.'

That was Cooper's note, and it brought a fever of speculation. All the bright scene of life that he left

behind him as he rode, the organized force that it expressed, the grand extensions of which it was becoming pregnant—all of it, like Brandon himself, might be shattered by what Cooper had to say. For all of it was based on the strength of one compelling man by arches that must crumble at the touch of truth. The error of an ally, the word of a traitor, would bring down the building like a heap of dust, to bury its unholy architect beneath it. All the world would say that in spite of his eager arguments and fire of enthusiasm, he had taken their money, time, labour, and honour, like a cheating company promoter, to rake in personal gains by swindling his friends and wrecking his defrauded rival. Where would the club be then? It was well for the club that its leader could forget it and turn the point of his brain to the quarter of danger. He was on the road where he had ridden with St. Agnes and opened the secrets of his heart. He was riding to the inn whose sinister sign had helped him to express the purpose of his life. The King of Prussia was still a circle of fire within him, the crater of his spirit. He was unchanged, though now his being was consumed by the peril and toil and chances of another fight, and by its joy.

He could hear Cooper telling him that So-and-so had blown the gaff; that Willoughby was up, and Cayle abuzz with rage. The sky was gray with the rush of cloudy schemes that formed and transformed and chased across his vision, offering brilliant methods of escape, though disaster already should be on them. To give up a fight was not among the vices of Brandonites.

But things were not so bad as he made himself ready to hear. He hastened to the room where his lieutenant waited, and stood hot with riding and excitement, prepared for news, switching his leg, jerking, staring; and Cooper, dressed in Sabbath-keeping brown, smoothed his hair as though a gust of wind had blown across the room. But he would have smoothed his hair at the crack of doom. His serenity was no comfort for Brandon, who knew his ways.

‘What is it?’ he asked.

'Mason has had another stroke,' said Cooper. 'It's really very inconvenient. They say he can't live a week. I met Dr. Wilkinson leaving the house at quarter to four, and I sent for you at once. It happened this afternoon.'

Brandon had long since breathed his own spirit into the great intrigue. He had taken the dry bones of Cooper's work and made a living body. Groups and interests in the council and the party had been nursed and drugged in accordance with a masterly idea these many weeks, but still they were unready for the day of explosion. The party had a promise from Sir Benjamin that he would not vacate the seat before it suited them, unless he should be made a peer. He was now about to receive a coronet of another kind, with equally inconvenient results. The seat would be vacant, and Willoughby was still unharmed.

'So it's now or never,' Cooper said.

Nature had taken her course, as was inevitable, and no one now stood nearer Brandon's heart than Cooper. He captured the affection of the man he loved as successfully as he had entangled the trust of the man he hated. Being one who stopped at nothing, and tainted with that fine insanity that was not found in Venning, being as free in judgment before the command went forth as he was blindly obedient after it, there was none more fitted to propound and discuss the question, 'Shall we risk it?'

It was as if they had a lot of eggs in an incubator, at various stages of development. The question was whether they dare pile on fuel, tap the shells with a hammer, and whether then the chickens would come out alive and cackle their votes for Brandon. There were the seven promised Brandonites whom Cooper had secured so long ago. There were the socialists, whose antagonism to Willoughby was slow in growing. There were the men who cared only for the rifle club, who had been employed for weeks past in sickening Willoughby with their tedious hobby. Some were personally hostile to him; some would like to help a lord. But of all these, how many could be trusted to perpetrate an immediate *coup d'état*? They would have been hatched in time, as

Brandon's plan required ; but if he cracked their shells, would he find live chickens or bad eggs ?

Could they be induced to pass a resolution asking Willoughby to resign, and then another asking Brandon to take his place ? The seat was not to be contested. In voting force, as a candidate, the people's hero was no more desirable than Willoughby ; and there was the risk of disclosing the plot.

What pictures can be drawn of great men at times of crisis ! It is wonderful to think of the iron-handed adventurer pronouncing in tones of cold resolve that he intends to win or die. Or there is the quiet strong man who says three meaning words—metaphorical, perhaps—and leaves the rest to be gathered from a study of the subsequent chapters. Another is happily inspired by the adage which exactly meets the case, such as ' Nothing venture, nothing have,' or he remembers in the nick of time that discretion is the better part of valour. But the leader of the Brandonites was not in rank with such as these. Like an unworthy schoolboy back from punishment, he paced the room with cursing, swearing, and blaspheming, because his luck was bad. He had no lack of vitality, but it was spent in impotent annoyance. It is surely a maxim with the learned doctors of philosophy that a great man will take misfortune greatly. But Cooper, who was better acquainted with the particular instance than the general principle, was content to wait in perfect peace, purring sympathy, till Brandon should have sworn himself empty. It would not be like Brandon to settle such a question as this on sensible lines. He seldom thought ; he waited till the voice whispered.

' Shall we have some tea ? ' Cooper suggested, kicking under the rickety sofa a spittoon which appeared to give Brandon violent shocks of disgust each time he passed it in his walk.

He rang the bell, and raised the devil in the person of an angry woman who did not like earthly labour on a Sunday afternoon.

' Then we'll come and forage for ourselves,' he said.

He took hold of Brandon by the neck, still spluttering,

and firmly led him off to act as assistant kitchen-maid.

It was the cleverest thing he could have done. Having trodden on the cat and burnt his fingers with the kettle, cut butter with the onion knife, and run his face against the inside of a pig which hung on the larder door, Brandon was much more ready for rational discussion. To some extent the voice had whispered.

They went back to the dirty parlour and the smell of stale beer. Cooper poured out tea, and Brandon sat like Blake, cross-legged on the hearthrug, considerably cooled.

'The infernal thing is that we've got to settle it at once,' he said.

That was what he resented.

Cooper had a chart with the latest reports of the attitudes of each of the forty members of the council, but Brandon did not like his charts. He perused it only under protest.

Counting the Brandonites, the socialists, and the rifle maniacs, they had a bare majority.

'If we could make them all drink blood,' said Brandon.

But would they come up to the scratch at such short notice?

Furthermore, they were hampered by the necessity of keeping the leader in the background. Unless the *coup d'état* could be made to seem the spontaneous act of a rebellious council, Brandon would stand convicted of conspiracy. His name would stink in Cayle—and elsewhere, too.

'It reduces itself to this,' said Cooper—'have you the nerve to give us our heads?'

That, of course, made Brandon sulky.

'And if I give you your head, what do you mean to do?' he asked.

'Go on my knees to all our men and fight a straight fight on a faked issue,' said Cooper.

'It's not good enough; they won't fight,' said Brandon, pronouncing without explanation, on the authority of the voice.

Strong tea began to do its invigorating work.

'Do you remember,' he said, 'how Themistocles fought the battle of Salamis?'

Cooper was afraid he had forgotten, which was just what Brandon wanted. There was no story he better loved to tell.

'My God! it was the cleverest thing a man ever did. The Greeks had got their fleet sitting tight in a narrow channel with the Persians at one end. Themistocles wanted to fight, so as to save Athens; but all the allied generals were hounds, and each of them wanted to sail off and protect his own damned country. "Strike, but hear me!" You remember that? Themistocles lied and swore and bribed and all the rest of it, but he couldn't make the devils fight. So he wrote out exactly what they all proposed to do, and the disputes they were having, and betrayed the whole lot to the Persian King without turning a hair. The King sent a polite note of thanks, and sent off half his fleet post-haste to bottle up the other end of the channel, and got ready to fall on them from both sides while they were squabbling. Then Themistocles went to the generals again—he took Aristides, to show he wasn't lying—and told them exactly what had happened: how their retreat was cut off, and the King informed of their plans. He told them, as they wouldn't fight before for the common cause of Greece, that now they'd damned well got to save their own skins. Then he proceeded to win the battle. That's rather a pretty story; don't you think so?'

Cooper was quite aware that this story was not told to pass the time. Also, as cursing had given way to sulkiness, so sulkiness was followed by a hard glint of cunning in Brandon's eyes, not boding well for the Persian King.

'It's an excellent story,' Cooper murmured. 'But suppose the King had been unwilling to fight?'

'Look here,' said Brandon excitedly, 'what we've got to do is to rally all the anti-Brandonites in Cayle. Damn it! Willoughby can be made to take alarm. That's where you come in. Let him call his dogs about him; let him find a movement asking him to lead it.'

'This is all on a very big scale,' said Cooper. 'It's the same plan we've had all along—your plan, in fact—to make Willoughby commit an act of war against the socialists and the club. That doesn't help us towards any immediate rupture.'

'It does,' said Brandon. 'Originally, we wanted our men to get sick of Willoughby. This time we'll make them frightened of him instead. We'll make him show his teeth. My God! yes, I've got it now.'

'So we are going to risk it, after all?' said Cooper. 'It means doubling the loss, you know, if we lose; and it will look fishy if the battle comes just when the seat is going to become vacant. I shall have to lead the row, and I'm still on good terms with Willoughby, remember.'

'Remember Lot's wife,' said Brandon impatiently. 'My God! I'm not going to begin to be prudent at my age! I'll have Willoughby's blood; I'll get this seat and smash up my enemies at last. We've been in this saddle long enough, Roger, and now the fence has come we've got to take it, even if we break our necks the other side. If I turned back now I should feel I was tearing up my whole nature by the roots.'

From which outburst it was to be gathered that his judgment, if such a thing he had, was settled in favour of the leap.

'Very well,' said Cooper. 'If I can't trust your prudence I can trust your wits. And I think you're right.'

A letter was to be written to Willoughby by someone to induce him to make a public declaration against as many of Brandon's potential allies as could be included in one fulmination. At Brandon's dictation Cooper wrote the draft.

'DEAR MR. WILLOUGHBY,

'In view of the recent unprecedented desecration of the Sabbath by the rifle club in this town, and in view of the proposed attempt to induce you to plead in the House of Commons for a Government grant of money

to this institution, which is well known to be a hotbed of trades-unionism and vice, I feel it my duty to ask you whether you propose to accede to the above request which its members are to make to you, and whether you give countenance to the dangerous and socialistic principles it represents.'

'Now for a veiled threat,' said Brandon.

'A very large number of my friends will, like myself, await with keen anxiety your answer to this question, which I am sending to the *Advertiser*, in order to afford you the opportunity of publicly reassuring the leading classes of our community. If you will pardon a straight question, do you propose to be the puppet of the club or do you not ?

'Yours faithfully.'

And who was to send it ?

'The Mayor,' said Brandon, without hesitation. 'He'll think he's dealing me my death-blow. That's where one's enemies come in so usefully.'

It was agreed that the question would come better from the Mayor than from anyone else. But who was to persuade the Mayor to do it ?

This was the hardest piece to fit into the puzzle, for the man whom they chose to send to dupe the Mayor would know the true source of the letter, and would have the key that might disclose the whole conspiracy. And this person must be one who had no open connection with Brandon, or the Mayor would suspect.

It was the last question propounded in the parlour at the King of Prussia, and it was the one most full of human interest ; for though they racked their brains to find a man for the purpose, though they struggled and strove to avoid the one solution, they could think of none but Cooper's father. He, in his dislike of Brandon, would use his powerful influence with the Mayor, and in the confusion of the great battle he would hardly like to foul his own nest by disclosing his son's performance. It might never be known that the Mayor had been tricked. As Cooper's connection with Brandon was still a virgin

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secret, he would have no difficulty in making his father play the part.

But when in the council he led the Brandonite party to revolt, there would be a revolt in Cooper's family as well. That was not a thing to contemplate lightly. In any case, the family crisis was bound to occur when Cooper declared his change of sides; but his father had not such a perfect judgment as to prevent an extra rise of wrath when he learned that he himself had been used as a tool. Cooper's reluctance crystalized around this point.

He looked at Brandon, and Brandon looked at him, and they remembered the day when Cooper had said: 'To any lengths.'

But Brandon's eyes were cold steel, with nothing in them to suggest that Cooper should turn his head from the fence. One home had been wrecked already, and the sign of the King of Prussia still swung on the Camley Road.

A slight flush came over Cooper's clear dark face, the tenderest smile, and the twinkle of fun with which his eyes saved every situation that was strained.

'The broken flower-pot, or little Willie's first lie,' he drawled, and Brandon knew that he had yielded.

'It must be to-night,' he said. 'The Mayor must write to-morrow.'

'All right,' said Cooper.

Then Brandon's hard face gave way to a fit of nervous twitching, and he got up from the hearthrug. Cooper stood and laughed at him in soft mockery.

'You'll never want money, Roger, whatever happens,' Brandon remarked indifferently. 'Rupert has made it all right for me in his will.'

'So we're ready for all emergencies,' said Cooper.

Brandon rang the bell and ordered his horse. Cooper was to follow him on foot as soon as it was safe.

'I'll climb in and see you to-night,' he said.

Cooper was so neat that it was a desecration to touch him, but Brandon took him softly by the throat, again

charged with that suppressed vitality which could be almost felt.

‘When you and I met,’ he murmured, ‘it was about the best thing that ever happened to—to either of us, by God!’

A minute later he was riding fast back to the town that he was a second time to set in flames.

## CHAPTER XXII

'HAVE we had luncheon or have we not?' asked Blake of Alice as he came in hot and excited to find her alone under the chestnut-tree.

The question was typical of the times. Meals, like physical exhaustion, successes, and rebuffs, like even the hours of sleep, passed unnoticed in the turmoil. It was the period of six days from the Sunday of Sir Benjamin's stroke past the Friday of his death to the Saturday of the end. Blake gave his news up to date, such news as was to be heard from any of the party at any hour of day.

'I met Cooper in the street. He says Robinson has come in completely. He's that tailor chap, you know. But Burt and Smiley are giving trouble, talking about dragging the town in the dust, and so on. I say, Lady Alice, shall we have some tea brought out? I shan't get any dinner. I've got to spend the evening at the Working Men's Club, passing round the fiery cross, you know.'

Then came Benny Mason with the latest bulletin. He was backwards and forwards all day long. He would bring his news, and was generally willing to go on any errand Alice might request; for she was the one who was stationed at the hotel throughout the whole day to receive messages, her fingers blue with the resentment of the typewriter she had not learned to manage. Benny was off again in five minutes.

Tea was brought to them.

'Is Charley still at the Williams's?' Alice asked.

Blake believed so. Funny, wasn't it, that the heart of the intrigue should be in a working man's bedroom

in Mercy Lane? Alice agreed that the proper place would be the cellar below the Willoughbys' house; but the fact was that Brandon had to lie hidden somewhere, and the hotel was too conspicuous a place for him to stay there and receive the many people who came to see him, so he spent most of his days at the Williams's.

Then Blake hurried away, and Alice was left alone. Even now, after but two days of this life, the cessation of activity brought rest that was like a numbness. She knew that each of her friends would at that moment be engaged in some piece of negotiation, and yet it is impossible to conceive of those days as a series of events. They could not do so themselves. Not until the peace that followed did they patch together their adventures into a more or less connected whole. And even then the story was like nothing outside a madhouse, for their recollections were inconsistent and divergent; occurrences seemed to stand alone, purposeless, as in a dream, and it was impossible to explain why So-and-so was present, why the scene was where it was, who made the unfortunate remark, and so on. As to their hopes and fears and tremors, those were like the bruises that come in a fight; it was not till afterwards they could realize the existence of what had been. They did not live at all till they had lived again. They moved like the senseless levers of a big machine, from the moment when Brandon came back from the King of Prussia and gave the word of battle.

'Well, Alice, it seems to me you people are approaching some sort of crisis.' It was the Dean, who roused her from something like sleep. 'And I can tell you there's a crisis in the other camp. That foolish letter of the Mayor's seems to have opened all the old sores. They're even thinking of bringing down a Radical from London to fight the seat against our disunited party. I met Henry Willoughby looking positively anxious.'

'Quick!' said Alice; 'tell me everything you have heard! I have so little time to spare.'

The Dean smiled and shook his head.

'Like Roger Cooper, I am in the confidence of both parties.'

'Roger Cooper?' exclaimed Alice.

'Bless my soul, yes,' said the Dean. 'I read his heart before the rest of you had descried him on the horizon. But I've kept your secret, Alice, and I will keep it to the end. You must not ask me to do more than that.'

However, it was easy to learn of the town's excitement without requiring anyone to betray a confidence. Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet signalled to St. Agnes from her carriage.

'You're the first clubsman I've met to-day,' she said. 'I insist on your coming home to tea.'

But St. Agnes, though his tried face drew out the widow's maternal firmness, was resolute in refusing. He had a dozen more men he ought to see before he could go home.

'I've quite made up my mind that we went too far in having our shooting on Sunday,' said she. 'I had luncheon at the Deanery, and you'd never believe how angry they are. They've really driven the poor Dean from the house. Everywhere I go it's the same story. I really think we did wrong, though it's not an easy question. And we had the Dean. But it's preposterous to say that Sir Benjamin's stroke was a judgment, for Dr. Wilkinson tells me it was bound to come. But this will make it impossible for us ever to get help from the Willoughbys. I met her in the shops, the silly woman! with quite a crowd round her.'

St. Agnes went on his way regardless of the drizzle that began. A friend slapped his back.

'Heavy fall in that Brandonite stock of yours, old chap! Now's the time to sell out, if you want to escape a smash.'

'Indeed, indeed,' said he, the time not being one for retorts.

'The Liberals have got a barrister fellow coming from Town to make a fight.'

St. Agnes was more interested. Excellent Mr. Brown, it was he who had undertaken to circulate that lie.

'But I believe it's all a plant of Willoughby's,' said the man. 'He has spotted the chance of stamping on young Brandon, rifle club and all, and he's not going to miss it.'

St. Agnes laughed dully. He wondered if his ingenious friend had noticed Cooper as he rattled past them in a hansom. Ten minutes later he was with his leader in the Williams's bedroom.

'My God, Rupert! I've run out of tobacco!' was Brandon's greeting.

St. Agnes gave him a pouch, also the paper on which he had noted all information gathered since last they met. This Brandon read, and pocketed without comment. In these days comment was mostly heard in the form of further orders.

'We can't go another step till Willoughby's reply is out,' he said.

It was Tuesday, and the Mayor's letter had appeared in Monday's *Advertiser*.

Brandon was neither tired nor excited. At this time, when everything was abnormal, he alone seemed normal, he who was out of focus at times of peace. He showed no greater emotion than does a well-bred man playing bridge for high stakes. Not a word of impatience came from him, but much good-humour. His appetite was good; he did not jump if you dropped a spoon. He noticed that Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet had put a purple feather in last year's autumn hat.

'I tell you what it is,' he said. 'It wouldn't take me long to quarrel with these socialists.'

'Have you seen many to-day?' asked St. Agnes.

Brandon gave the names of four who had been to see him, though probably they would have foamed at the mouth to hear the political designation he gave them. They had come to ask if he could not frighten Willoughby into answering the Mayor's letter in a sense that would please the trades-unionists. That was the stage they had reached on Tuesday afternoon.

'That's a useful sort of request to make to you just now,' said St. Agnes.

Brandon laughed.

'They're children in these matters,' he said. 'But they're so damned anti-national, you know. I used to think it was because they had caught the cosmopolitan fever, but it isn't. It's simply a case of *après moi le deluge*. These devils want to bag all the capital in the country to fill their bellies with.'

'They're mad,' said St. Agnes.

'No, that's the trouble; they're not,' Brandon answered. 'They talk very good sense. They see a stock of good things lying about in the country, and they don't see why they shouldn't damned well bag the spoils. Let us eat and drink, and to-morrow, not we, but our children shall die. That's why they preach economy in taxes and extravagances in rates. Taxes are for their children's benefit; rates are for their own.'

'You mean they'd like to spend sixty millions on free dinners instead of on national defence,' said St. Agnes.

'You can make them confess it if you corner them,' said Brandon. 'And then they turn round and make you confess you don't care a damn if half the population starves provided the nation goes ahead. That's the trouble.'

'You've not been saying that to-day?' asked St. Agnes in surprise.

'Lord, no! In details we agree eight times out of ten, because neither side dares to go to extremes, and this week, of course, we agree in everything. But a time will come.'

He sat at the table playing with his pen.

'Mason is worse,' said St. Agnes.

Brandon frowned slightly.

'Poor old chap!' he said. He had a great liking for the old man who hated Willoughby.

'He might go off at any minute,' said St. Agnes. 'But, thank the Lord! we've got the official power on the council. It can't meet till I summon it as president. We can wait till we're ready.'

Brandon said nothing, but began to discuss the possibility of getting Willoughby hooted by a mob. St.

Agnes, however, had not time to spare for talking. He started on his rounds again.

Coming from the office of the *Advertiser* was Venning, pale and worried. He passed Dusky Williams drinking at the fountain in the High Street.

'Well, Dusky,' he said.

'Mr. Venning! By God, sir, they've tried to buy me!'

'What, Willoughby?'

'Upworth,' hissed the boy, black with rage. 'He said he'd get me into Jones and Railton's if I'd tell all I knew.'

'But this is most important!' said Venning. 'It means that they've grown suspicious. We must tell Lord Charley at once.'

Loyalty was Brandon's hobby; even in its crudest forms he loved it. But if only Dusky had been smart enough to go as Hushai to the camp of Absalom! Loyalty such as Dusky's has its drawbacks. However, he rejoiced at the sheer stupidity of his opponents.

Venning returned from Mercy Lane to the hotel. Like Alice and the rest, he moved in a dream. The hunger of reflection gnawed at his mind, but time and inclination for reflection were denied him in the unreality of the present life. What was this he was told to do? To organize a party for the races of Trevor Bridge on Thursday. He, Venning, was to fill half a dozen brakes with the young and old of Cayle, to carry verbal invitations, excite himself, hire the vehicles, manage the catering, that dust might be thrown in the eyes of the world. The town was to jingle with Brandon's gaiety. After all, he in such an occupation was not stranger than Blake, the Oxford trifler, stirring a mob to fury, or the mechanic Dusky, whom he left conspiring with the son of an English peer. And he knew that a spirit foreign to himself would stiffen him for his work in the insubstantial pageant, though it be the ordering of galantine of veal. They were none of them quite themselves.

He went into a shop for food, and there was Cooper feeding too. But they dared not speak. Then to the hotel to get the names of some people to ask to the races.

'Whenever I sit down I ask myself if we are going to win or lose,' he said to Alice, 'and when I get up I forget all about it.'

'We never ask that question,' said she, not giving an exhortation as much as a statement of fact. Besides, her imagination was fired by this last idea about the races; it was like a sight of Charley himself.

'At such a time as this,' said Venning, 'who else would have thought of organizing a picnic?' But Alice was already thinking of guests and food.

There were other people in the paths of this strange maze, scurrying round like frightened ants, like Brandonites without a Brandon, since the morning of Monday. Willoughby came down to breakfast that day blithe and healthy as the rising sun should be, yet not without a tribute of sobriety for poor Sir Benjamin.

'A rally yesterday night? That's good. I'm afraid he must be thinking that all his money is of little use to him now.'

'It'll be useful enough to that grandson of his,' said his father.

'And to some charities, let us hope,' said Mrs. Willoughby.

Henry sighed energetically.

'I could have wished him a worthier heir as he lies on his death-bed,' he said. 'I have very little confidence in that boy. He is not what a boy should be, and when that is the case it is safe to say that when he is a man he will not be what a man should be. There's a great deal of truth in the saying that the boy is the father——' But the servants were coming in to prayers.

Evidently family worship was a consolation, for Willoughby spoke no more of his sorrow for Sir Benjamin. He addressed himself jovially to an eight-year-old cousin.

'Mensa, mensa, mensam, red currant and raspberry jam,' he said, making that kind of *bon mot* which throws the burden of wit on the victim who has to reply. The uninventive but prudent lad made a diversion by giving him his letters. And then the trouble began.

'Where's the *Advertiser*?' he exclaimed.

'Yes! Great heavens! the Mayor must be mad. Good gracious! good gracious! I should like a cup of tea, and then I must be off at once. This is most critical! He held up the paper, crunching unoffending columns in his hand, and pointed to the blazing indiscretion that was headed in large type, 'Mr. Willoughby and his Party.' 'Quick! I must telephone for Roger Cooper. I must see him at once.' But though he had set bloodhounds on his track he could not have caught that adroit ally of his until, for good or ill, he had answered the Mayor's letter.

At luncheon they were in a better position to discuss it. They saw it was not an isolated freak of the Mayor's, but the outcome of a genuine and general feeling in the town.

At dinner they knew that Cayle was only waiting for a lead to hurl the Brandonites to destruction. That was clear from information coming from all sources, and sometimes from quarters that had appeared until Sunday to be well disposed to Brandon and the club.

'It would not be right of you, Henry, to fail to voice the views of your principal supporters,' said his father.

'Nevertheless, the poorer classes have a claim on my consideration,' Willoughby replied cautiously. 'We must be fair.'

Discussion with Willoughby was always difficult. The dictates of intelligence had to be hidden in the jam of morality before he would listen at all; and from the jam that he gave you in return you had to extract what powder it might contain—a much more difficult process.

Tuesday brought the suggestion of a possible Liberal candidate, and the maxim that submission to intimidation was disgraceful. The ants scampered with agitated legs through the halls of the Tories. The Dean would not advise; Cooper was nowhere to be found; Upworth had absurd suspicions; the *Advertiser* was studiously neutral; Sir Benjamin was worse. But on Tuesday night the fateful letter was sent off.

'Excellent—excellent!' cried his father as he read the draft.

'I am sorry for Brandon,' said the candidate, 'but he brings it on himself. I must not disappoint my friends. And between you and me, Brandon is so discredited that the Radicals would never take him back again, so we have little to fear in putting right before expedience.'

The answer is out! It was rumoured in drawing-rooms by late visitors, whispered at the theatre, fanned into gossip at the club. But the purport of the answer was unknown. St. Agnes hurried to tell Brandon.

'Get hold of Benny Mason,' the leader directed. 'Keep him at the hotel. We may want him as a lever on the *Advertiser*.'

One by one they returned to the hotel for necessary food and sleep. A table was spread with cold meats in the smoking-room where Alice sat with Benny Mason.

First Venning arrived.

'The answer is out,' he said, dropping into a chair. 'I heard it from Brown. No one knows what it is like.'

St. Agnes came reporting the same news. Blake, gay and ravenous, came in and assaulted the food, more interested in his own achievements at the Working Men's Club than in the purport of the answer.

Then Brandon, with Dusky, dirty and hungry and hot. You could see that he was still fresh to concentrate attention on Blake's report of the working men's attitude, and Venning's of the preparations for the picnic. Not a word was said that did not reach his brain. Whisky made little difference in the steady brightness of his eyes. But having heard them out his conversation was a babble of excited trivialities.

They were expecting Cooper's dark shadow on the window; he was waiting at the *Advertiser* office to get first news of Willoughby's reply. They talked a great deal of brilliant nonsense about the gems of thought and language which it might contain, and Dusky, with natural cleverness, had receptive ears for the strange humour of the class whose ways he was learning. Benny Mason, dangerously flushed, knew that at last he was a man.

How much of this could he transplant into Harrow clay?

Not long after ten the window creaked, and Cooper struck them silent by his entrance. It was not to be expected that he would blurt his news before he had looked from face to face to see what form suspense assumed in each. It was the only payment he exacted. He was interested, for though good news might not ensure a final victory, bad news would mean failure beyond doubt, and this was common knowledge in the room.

'Here it is,' he said. 'It's a conclusive proof that the pen is mightier than the sword—for suicidal purposes.'

He spread out the hasty pencil copy on the table under the lamp, and all heads, from Dusky's respectful black one on the outskirts to Brandon's fair one in the front, were huddled over it. Choice phrases were shouted aloud, generally by Blake.

"I thank you for giving me the opportunity——" Oh, he's most welcome.

"The Sabbath is every Englishman's inheritance." We're not Englishmen, that's clear.'

'By God! here it is: "The enemies of society masquerading as patriots." He's done it, he's done it!'

"Corrupting the honesty of the working classes, whom no one respects or admires more than I."'

"Personally, Lord Charles is my valued friend." We'll have him up for libel.'

"My unqualified hostility——"'

"To your last question an unhesitating No."'

"I am neither a militarist nor a professional agitator, and I do not intend to be a puppet of anyone."'

'Now let's raffle for it as a keepsake,' said Blake.

They were mad with excitement, all except Alice and Cooper, who watched Brandon. His forehead was knotted and his mouth working.

'It's clever,' he said. 'But I think we can make it do. Give me some paper.'

He drank off a whisky-and-soda, and took the letter out of the room. They knew that he had gone to write

the leading article for to-morrow's *Advertiser*. Even to this extent did the complaisance of the editor go, for he had his eye on the day, three years ahead, when that excellent Brandonite Benny Mason would be master of the paper and his fate.

By eleven o'clock Cooper and Benny had departed over the wall with the draft of the article. For the only time that week the party had enjoyed a half-hour of festivity with the proceeds of a *post obit* on their labours.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**THERE** are two distinct methods of intercourse between mind and mind. In one of them facts are used only as a vehicle for ideas, in the other the facts are absolute and self-sufficient. Anyone who has heard a pause broken at dinner by his neighbour remarking, fork in mid-air, that the normal temperature of a chicken is something like a hundred and eight, has experienced the latter method. It is also believed to be true that the word 'and' occurs six thousand and seventy-two times in the Bible. It was a complaint against Brandon, made by those whom wearied civility did not content, that he cared nothing for interesting facts, and had no desire to be well informed. To a rebuke like this he once in school-boy days replied, after some calculation on his shirt-cuff, that twenty-three times thirty-two are seven hundred and thirty-six. 'Now I'm sure you didn't know that before.' But he could not help spoiling the effect of his absurdity by asking in good faith why that information, which was both true and novel, should not be interesting.

The truth is that no fact is, or ever was, of the smallest interest unless it has some significant relation to the ideas of the persons handling it. Roger Cooper, who was necessarily, as chief agitator on the council, the hardest worked of Brandonites, could have filled ten books of commentaries with the events of the campaign's last week of tumult. And it can be imagined how many subsequent hours of peace were thick with their narration. But memory was merciful. Only a residuum—that which was very dramatic, very intimate, or very typical—remained. For the rest, there was a blur not

to be handled or communicated to others, for the very attempt to recall it was like trying to conceive eternity—distressing and impossible.

For instance, there was a vivid picture of the scene with Willoughby, when the traitor laid bare, not his treachery, but its outcome, waving the *Advertiser* in well-simulated rage, and bitterly reproaching Willoughby because he had attacked those members of the party who were most deserving of respect. This was the decent form in which Cooper had to clothe his desertion. Willoughby stood aghast before the placid man with whom he had taken sweet counsel. But there was no nobler maxim in his repertoire than that which said: 'To thine own self be true.' He felt that for the purposes of the case in point his own self was one of righteous indignation, and Cooper gave him ample scope for being true to it.

'You are impious and insulting and obscene. You refused me your advice, and you have no right to blame me for taking my own course. We had better part until you come to another frame of mind. There are others who will help me through a time of trouble.'

So Cooper left him alone, the dogs not far behind him now, the acutest brains in Cayle closing in for his destruction.

Again, a memorable moment of those days was when he heard the sound of hoots and jeers in one of his many swift journeys in a hansom cab. He leant forward to see what moved the little crowd to anger. It was Willoughby, coming out of a shop.

But it was only indirectly that crowds mattered now. The members of the council and their votes were the field of Cooper's work; the straight and crooked influences that swayed them, the suffocating air of diplomacy, the ceaseless strain of caution, the eternal smile that became a torture on his face, the soft words, trowel and butter, the tangle of facts, the pitfalls. This was the blur at which even memory sickened. Cooper had not great physical endurance. He was, moreover, a villain whose villainy cost him many pangs. The wild dance

of events continued, disappointments thickened, and the stern reason of the man best fitted to judge spelt out a prophecy of looming failure. How often in those days did Cooper go for stimulus to the vision, not of a passionless, cool leader on the field of battle, but of a nerve-worn hero in the Assembly Hall who faced the yells and cheers of two thousand friends in an atmosphere tingling with triumph! This is the value of sheer splendour to the imaginative; the peal of glory echoes courage.

Again, it was not to be forgotten—nor, indeed, to be often told—how one day in the Working Men's Club he met Blake. It was on the last day, when all masks were off, and they could talk together openly—something he had said or looked to show that he was sad and weary to death; and Blake, like the thoroughbred he was, was spic and span with buoyancy that would not leave him till he dropped. It was blood, blood, as Venning said. Very vividly did Cooper recollect the charge of encouragement that nerved him as Blake threw an arm round his neck and led him off to the bar.

'What you want, Roger, is a couple of brandies-and-sodas.'

The old demonstrative puppy-dog affection of boyhood survived to serve between Blake and his new war brother, an actual asset to which the brandy was mere sauce. And with unconscious tact he rattled on with yarns of old Eton and Oxford fights between Brandon and his foe.

'Lord, if you'd been with us through all that, you'd know what I feel when I think of getting Willoughby by the throat.'

Had Charley always the same extraordinary enjoyment in danger? Was he the same at school? Cooper asked. Blake had never known Charley anything but the best of sportsmen.

'I wonder if he sees that it isn't so enjoyable for some of us?' said Cooper.

Blake looked at him so that for an instant, through Charley, their souls were one.

'He won't say much,' he murmured, 'but he'll never forget it.'

Times of crisis are always on the verge of being humorous, and the humour of these days was brought out most often by the difficulty of communication between Cooper and the rest. It was essential that he should keep up the appearance of independent action. Meeting at night was comparatively easy, but in the daytime the danger sometimes made it next to impossible. At the top of the City Club in Market Square there was a writing-room, and more than once it was in this room that Venning and Cooper met to talk, with Blake keeping *cave* on the landing, and a way of escape open by the door into the adjoining room. A much-told story was that of how Cooper followed Venning into this room, through the door, and along the back of the screen which kept out draughts, and was brought to a stop by seeing Venning's hand fly out behind him as he said in tones of breathless effusiveness :

'Oh, Willoughby ! are *you* here ?'

Cooper started back, but was checked in the rear by Blake.

'Get on through into the other room,' said he, before Cooper could stop him. 'Here's old Willoughby coming upstairs.'

'Have you seen Henry anywhere up here ?' cried the loud-voiced genial parent.

A waiter, perhaps inspired by Heaven, dashed round the corner, and sent a tray of coffee-cups hurtling to the floor among them, just as Blake pushed Cooper down the stairs, because, as he explained, he had seen Venning's nose emerging from the writing-room at a pace so unnaturally slow that it could only mean that Willoughby was behind him. But that was Cooper's version. Blake always maintained that Cooper must have charged into the waiter intentionally. Venning described how Blake's abuse of the man had saved the situation. But then, they never knew if it was saved or not.

There were also the recollections that time left high and dry by reason of their rocky durability as types.

There is clover of dogged loyalty in the fields of ordinary mankind, often to be found where the grass is dustiest. A snuffy old Colonel, who has appeared for an instant in these pages, was a member of the council. He seemed to regard himself as pledged to the support of anything in Brandon's name because of his position in the rifle club. When Cooper came to stiffen his back he was resentful.

'Just tell me when to put up my hand and when to put it down, and let's have no more of this nonsense.'

Cooper remembered that, and no wonder, for it was unique. But, as Brandon foretold, the difficulty was not so much in retaining loyalty as in bringing it up to the scratch. Cooper found himself regarded even as a kind of joke. Men who were ready to ladle out reprobation of Willoughby's answer to the Mayor, who would gladly have seen Brandon cut his throat, when asked to help in the murder by constitutional means, would grin, or would flop in indolence.

'We shall have a member who never lifts his voice on behalf of the people,' he said to one of the genus socialist.

'More shame to him !' said the man.

'More shame to us, surely, if we allow it!' said Cooper. ever suave, and proceeded to show how it could be prevented. 'You always said you wished Lord Charles were in his place.'

'So I do,' was the answer ; 'but we must leave these things to work out in their own way. What must be will be, I say.'

One often hears these appeals to the law of Nature from people who forget that they themselves, willing or unwilling, are parts of Nature.

'Think of the scandal,' was another common argument.

It was typified by the man who added an observation about old Richardson getting into the Divorce Court. 'He might as well have been through bankruptcy, though, indeed, he had right on his side.'

It must not be supposed that all these depressing remarks were from people who persisted in their aloofness. When the days of smiles returned Cooper would

quote them often ; about his own answers he was more reticent.

'I hoped, sir,' he once said, 'that you would regard yourself as a trustee for the poor dumb masses who cannot speak for themselves. It is easy to see that they would wish Lord Charles to be their member.'

'Come, come,' was the reply ; 'there's no such great danger really. Willoughby only wants to encourage his own class a bit. Once he's safely elected he'll be friendly enough to the masses and their club.'

Again, it was said :

'To be sure, it's most elevating to hear Lord Charles talk politics. He's sound. Still, for his own good, we mustn't get him mixed up in a row like this.' Cruel only to be kind ;—another type.

Cooper had to improve on St. Paul's advice, and suffer fools enthusiastically. Even among the hottest partisans the same butter must be laid on, the same incessant caution kept on stretch. There was one violent little cripple with a pension and a typewriter who had somehow possessed himself of the direst secrets of the party. Cooper would hear his crutch pursuing him in the street.

'Have you seen So-and-so ? No ? Never you mind about it. I'll go home and write him a line with my typewriter.'

Cooper had enough experience of the output of this typewriter to dread it heartily. It was a sort of infernal machine, he said. You never knew when it might go with a crash of indiscretion and blow them all to bits.

He went to Brandon and told him plainly that they were going to lose ; but Brandon had ceased to be amenable to reason. Each depressing piece of news served only to tighten his ropes. As the Bishop had said, he was too tough for flogging now. He would button up his coat, swear a little, walk about the room, and fall to talking of the next move in the game.

The heaviest blow that Cooper had to bear was on the Thursday night when he went home to bed. At home

he was already in the position of a convicted criminal bound over to come up for sentence, but that was a small matter in these days. He found awaiting him an official letter from Willoughby, requesting him, as a member of the council, to attend a meeting on the Saturday afternoon.

He was stunned. The one source of his remaining hopes was in the knowledge that they could choose their own time for the final assault. No one had believed that Willoughby would start the charge himself. Yet this summons, in the existing state of things, could have no other meaning. Therefore next morning he went early to the hotel, and there was not one among his memories more vivid than this. He found Blake and Venning at breakfast.

'Well, I think we're dished now,' he said.

They rose from the table and volleyed questions.

'Willoughby has stolen a march, called the council. The Lord knows who has put him up to it. He has called a meeting for to-morrow, and I wanted another week.'

'Can't we keep our men away,' said Blake. 'He hasn't any right to call a meeting. He's not president.'

'And leave Willoughby to boss the show, and have us voted off the council?'

'Dear me—dear me! this is fearful,' said Venning.

They looked at one another blankly, and Cooper asked for Brandon.

'He's not up yet. Come on; we'll wake him.'

Blake led the way to Brandon's bedroom, and opened the door for Cooper to go in first. And Cooper, though his nerves were strained with anxiety, was suddenly checked. There was no servant to give proper attention to this room, and it was difficult indeed amid the piles of untidiness to detect which was the bed. But it was not that which brought him to a standstill. Never before had he seen Brandon asleep, and the whole crisis of the morning was placed by memory round the picture of this instant. What is the face of a man who sleeps? It is an echo of himself thrown back in subtle waves from a

rock that is beyond our vision. Brandon lay under the open window absolutely at rest, the furrows of nerves smoothed out. Such sleep was an index of indomitable health. In one whose waking hours were always at the top of animation or at the bottom of exhaustion it was a violation of all fairness. Cooper recalled a saying of the Dean's: 'Charley will not be great; he has too many enemies.' It was against this, that lay like a boy at the mercy of him and Blake and Venning, that so much hatred was directed; yet it did not seem a thing for hatred. Cooper received fresh stimulus. He remembered that he was one who stood between that sleep and the enemy's daggers. He would think of this when he stood up at the terrible meeting on Saturday. He would think of Charley asleep.

Yet this must be ended, and the face of the sleeper struck with news that would hurt. A sudden rush of sentiment made Cooper unable to be the man to do it. It seemed a desecration, not of him who slept, for he was strong enough, but of the exquisite peace whose hospitality he enjoyed.

Blake had no such scruples. He sat down on the bed, and shook lustily till Brandon woke.

'Wake up, you lazy devil! Now, you needn't hit me.'

For Brandon's eyes opened quickly, as though in time of war they remembered when sleep had been broken by visitors less friendly.

There was a certain gentleness in Blake's manner of telling the news, a proof of the severity of the blow.

'It can only mean that he has cleared for action,' said Cooper. 'He has got wind of our game somehow.'

Brandon's healthy colour did not leave him as he listened. They wondered that he could stretch himself so unconcernedly at such a moment.

'It doesn't much matter who it was,' said Cooper, 'but someone has evidently told him how we stand.'

'Oh, I did that,' said Brandon. 'I'm awfully sorry I didn't tell you fellows last night, but when I came in I wasn't feeling inclined to talk.'

Immediately Cooper recalled the story of Themistocles. Blake looked puzzled, Venning horrified.

'I saw Rupert at the races yesterday, and sent him back to fire off some indiscretions to Willoughby. You know the sort of thing—to boast of our being able to postpone the meeting as long as we liked, and all that sort of thing. I knew it would work if Willoughby had any spirit in him.'

'You gave us away yourself?' asked Blake, incredulous, his hand still on Brandon's shoulder. He was puzzled and distressed.

Brandon, yawning, answered, 'Yes.'

Suddenly he sat up in bed, springing to animation as a warrior springs to horse.

'Don't you see, man—don't you see? Those devils won't fight when we say they ought; let 'em fight to save themselves from annihilation. We'll see if they can fight to save themselves from being bunged off the council by Willoughby. One way or another I'll stop this humming and hawing. They can fight now, or they can be kicked off the stage.'

'How much does he know?' asked Cooper.

'He has the names of nearly all our men,' said Brandon. 'Rupert told him their names as a sort of boast. He told him just as many as looked as though we couldn't get a majority. They're all betrayed, all of them except about four. He knows they want to run me in as candidate.'

'Good God, Charley!' murmured Blake.

Venning fixed his eyeglass and looked vaguely through the window.

'Either this is the stupidest thing you've ever done,' he said, 'or it's the cleverest.'

Brandon looked pleased. He sprang out of bed, jumped into the bath that stood ready, and while he sponged, dried, and dressed himself he did not cease to bombard them with the full fire of his directions for the last phase of the campaign. It seemed that every detail he had heard that week was lying ordered on the surface of his memory. He had a scheme of work for each of his

agents to perform. Yet at a suggestion or criticism from any of them he was able in an instant to modify the whole to suit the altered fragment. Their hustled minds had little leisure for considering the amazing nature of the Themistoclean ruse.

They went to the room where breakfast was waiting, where Alice stood by the window with her letters.

'Sir Benjamin is dead,' she said.

But Brandon's thunderbolt had shattered the importance of that sad event. That which had once loomed as so portentous an occurrence came now to demand no more than the writing of a note of condolence to Benny.

'Le roi est mort,' said Venning; 'vive——'

He stopped, for the rest of the sentence would have had no meaning.

'Vive la bagatelle,' said Blake. He was in the best of spirits, the battle being near.

That day and the next the pot was fairly boiling over. The party from the hotel, unmuzzled at last, joined Cooper in his own work, and spread like fire and brimstone through the town the news of Willoughby's great plot against the rifle club and the Tory democrats. The sluggards were shaken, the incredulous were riddled with facts and exhortations, the confident were battered with vaticinations of peril, the despondent were electrified with hope. Brandon's name was spoken from the housetops plainly and nakedly; for the choice of Cayle was Willoughby or Brandon, now or never. And those two were the only politicians who sat at home that day.

Parties of working men in the evening were sent out by Blake and Dusky to fill the air with Brandon's name. The square was full of persons vainly shouting to him for a speech. They learned to sing the song that was appropriate, 'For Charley is my darling, my darling, my darling,' and wavering members of the council heard it as they hurried to their homes.

Saturday's *Advertiser* contained the promise of the rivals to abide by the council's decision, for the danger

of a triangular contest with a Liberal from London was passing from fiction to fact.

A madness seized the town of Cayle.

'If we lose,' said Mrs. Willoughby, 'it will kill Henry.'

The meeting of the council was fixed for half-past four.

## CHAPTER XXIV

INTO one of the smaller apartments at the Assembly Rooms walked a fat man girt with a watch-chain of gold. He looked round him, peered out of a window, consulted his watch, and reflected that punctuality is a royal virtue. He was one of Willoughby's supporters.

A burly mill foreman, in blue clothes and brown boots, strode in and stood on the hearthrug. Instinctively each man scented an opponent, and they glared at one another.

The room was comfortably furnished for its uses. Its walls were adorned with prints of eminent local and imperial men, such as Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Gladstone, and the late Mr. Pritchard-Martlet. A long table covered with green baize stood down the middle on a carpet soft to tread. Leather chairs were ranged round it, and broad seats were let in to the walls between the windows, and by the fireplace and door. An inkpot and some sheets of paper were waiting at one end of the table for the convenience of him who would occupy the armchair placed there as the seat of authority.

Third in time came Roger Cooper, with a steady hand. He would have spoken familiarly with the enemy had he not felt that the friend would have found offence in such an action, and therefore, leaning against the panel of a window, he chatted with the friend. An atmosphere of municipal dignity still lingered in the room. As the clock struck the quarter Mr. Brown came in, and with him the germs of excitement. He whispered eagerly with Cooper, left him, tackled the stout follower of Willoughby, and defended the rifle club by arguments from foreign policy. The tapping of a crutch was heard on the stone stairs outside. Immediately Cooper was at the side of

Mr. Brown, urging him for Heaven's sake to take charge of the little fire-brand cripple, and keep a hand over his mouth till the fight began.

For into this room the passions of a seething town were crowding, as a boulder gathers pace towards the bottom of the precipice, and crashes, and is still. Such was the position as they knew it, and as each man came, whether from the streets where knots of workmen shook the earth, *aut Brandon, aut nihil*, or from the neat drawing-rooms, the temples of respectability, or from the council of war at Upworth's house, or from the Royal Hotel, he brought a thing beside his vote—his quota of fevered emotion. It is the nature of votes to neutralize each other. But it is the nature of emotions to intensify, to coalesce like forty burning torches in one blaze mightier than their forty selves together.

Like a bull into his own field the Mayor came into the room, a friend on either side of him, a right worshipful frown across his face and girth. He brought the first frock-coat that graced the meeting. It was impossible for the good foreman of the mill to look at him and not feel lowered to the level of a rebellious schoolboy, for of all the faces then in the room the seat of righteousness was on his. He was of the official party. The foreman was not cheered till he saw the doorway filled by the broad person of the Very Reverend Dr. Russell, Dean of Cayle, chaplain to the rifle club, who smiled at him.

The minutes were passing. Members assured, and members shy, and members who wondered where to put their hats, came dribbling in by twos and threes. Cooper was flitting from one to another, now with a confident smile, and again with a grip of desperate exhortation. All talk was whispered. A solid phalanx of seven gathered round the foreman, and scowled at their betters. They were the original hired Brandonites whom Cooper induced Willoughby to welcome to the council to represent the Tory working men. It was not for these that he had last words before the fight—they were sure; but the Dean went up and spoke with them.

Often had Cooper wondered what would seem at the

last to be the point at issue between the rank and file on this side and on that. What would they talk about ? How would they in their own language explain the *casus belli* ? For the *casus belli* to the rank and file is seldom what it is to the chiefs. Most of his men had heard from him a different story. To one he had painted Willoughby in colours of rigid Toryism, to another he had talked of the unreasonable prejudice against the rifle club. Others were merely told that Willoughby was too unpopular to hold the seat against some future Radical demagogue or Labour man. And now they were together ; through their various coloured glasses the light of their wisdom was focussed on one spot. And he found that all of them were talking of Willoughby as a man who was too high-handed. That was the point they seized upon. It was common ground between them ; for were they not all to be turned neck and crop off the council if they disagreed with him in one particular ? Their enemies were even now saying so. Wherever Cooper went, from group to group in the room, he found this point of view predominant. Up to Friday morning no one had called Willoughby high-handed ; there had been no suspicion of his trying a *coup d'état*. But now, if the battle were to be won, Cooper realized that it had been won in the last two days. It was not until he heard his men talking among themselves that he realized that brilliant effectiveness of the stratagem borrowed from Themistocles.

Suddenly near the door voices rose above the hiss of whispering, and men turned to see the tall figure of the candidate, with his father beside him. He was talking aloud to the people who went up to shake hands with him. Very dignified, very genial, very courageous he looked, and instantly there accrued to the official party the advantage of a leader's presence. There he was ; and which of his men could desert him ? There, in the position they had given to him with their own free votes, he needed their help again to justify themselves and him. It was not difficult to be proud of him then, though murmurs might have been heard outside ; the loyalty of

very shame was awakened by his presence. Yet Cooper dodged in and out among them all.

Through a double line the candidate advanced to his favourite place on the hearthrug, shaking many hands, not without an extra pressure, and saved from his besetting conversational vices by reason of the number of persons among whom he had to apportion his remarks. Was there indeed an absurd suggestion of revolt? The walls of Jericho were not going to fall for that. It was well done, as Cooper saw.

And now the hour of fate was striking from the tower of the Town Hall, and the last members of the council were arriving. In little groups, as social rank and party spirit sorted them, they stood about the room, and one out of three was a spluttering partisan. Many there were who looked at friend and foe, realized the greatness of the hour, rejoiced in the party to which they had pledged their faith, and called themselves important. They were wrong; the only men who were important then were the seven or eight who had not made up their minds.

Three minutes late, and last of all came St. Agnes, the president. He wore no frock-coat, carried no ecclesiastical titles, was greeted by no group of friends, but came with the dignity of a simple nature to a work that he hated. He could not look at Willoughby, and would not look at Cooper. He was fearful of his party's weakness, ashamed of its strength, yet ready to play his own part like the business man he was. It was well for Brandon that he had another champion than this.

In him they heard the trumpet-call, and an expectant stillness spread through the room. He casually recognised a few friends, and sat down at once in the armchair. The members of the council seated themselves about the room. In scenes like this the pulse of suspense does not really beat until it beats amid silence.

Let it not be supposed that even the seating of the Brandonite party was the work of chance. Cooper was in the corner next to the fireplace; from what better place can one address a room? By his side were two notorious waverers. A timid tradesman found himself surrounded

in his corner by several stalwart members of the rifle club pronounced in Brandonite opinions. The father of two curates was honoured with the proximity of the Dean. The peppery Colonel could frown across the table at the man with whom he played bridge every night. Prosperous Mr. Brown sat between a hesitating solicitor and the ardent Tory tailor who made his clothes. On the right hand of the president was Willoughby.

In level, indifferent tones St. Agnes asked the secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting. When this was done he referred shortly to the death of Sir Benjamin Mason, and proposed a vote of condolence. It was carried without a word from anyone, and the breath of all came short for what was to follow. They were like lawyers fighting over the *onus probandi*—two parties at arm's-length, and each eager or reluctant to be the first to state its case. St. Agnes turned to Willoughby, and suggested coldly that he might have something to say to the meeting he had summoned. But Willoughby was adroit enough to avoid so obvious a snare. He had brought these men to the field of battle, but now *que messieurs les ennemis commencent*. He was going to reserve to himself the strength of the official person on his defence. It passed off in a little skirmish of eyes between St. Agnes and himself, in which he was victor. He rose and said that he had summoned the meeting, somewhat irregularly he feared, in order that members of the council might have an opportunity of asking him any questions with regard to his attitude as Conservative candidate.

He sat down, and the pulse of expectation beat, until it became clear that the second skirmish was to be decided in favour of the Brandonites. Very little things have great importance at a crisis, and Cooper's men had the superiority in discipline. Not one of them said a word in answer to Willoughby's offer of battle. It was a circumstance that might turn the scale. For one intolerable half minute there was utter silence in the room, every man's glance circling round and round to see who was going to break it. St. Agnes leant his elbows on the

table, put his finger-tips together, and looked bored. Then the party with the weaker discipline gave way. The Mayor rose to his feet.

So the first broadside opened, all about the crimes of faction and the virtue of unity. The Mayor knew that Mr. Willoughby agreed with him when he said that they must have a united council if they wished to frighten the Radicals away from Cayle. And a united council, by one method or another, they meant to have.

'May I ask, sir,' said St. Agnes, when he sat down, 'whether you are asking a question or proposing a resolution?'

Several voices called out 'Vote of confidence!'

'I move that this meeting records its confidence in Mr. Henry Willoughby, the Conservative candidate,' said the Mayor.

By the time Mr. Upworth had finished seconding the resolution the battle was in full swing, bullets whizzing and shells exploding. Willoughby's speech was exceedingly clever. His tone was moderate, and unity his one desire. Amid shouts of 'No, no!' he expressed himself willing to retire if a better candidate could be found. His letter in the *Advertiser* had been grossly misrepresented, etc. He would not deny that he had been a good deal pained by the unfriendly conduct of many members of this council. He hoped that they, like himself, would see the importance of maintaining the unity of the party. He was informed that the rules of the association provided a method by which unity could be achieved, but surely that would not be necessary.

Now, this was the scent of blood for which the whole room waited. The method of achieving unity was by sending the minority to the guillotine of expulsion, and the furnace of excitement was immediately seven times heated. Cooper, who had lounged in his seat, an amused spectator of the passions of smaller men, sat suddenly upright.

'Turn us off the council?' he cried rudely and angrily. He looked round the room indignant and fierce. 'I said so, I said so,' he declared.

From everywhere rose exclamations of anger, cries of eager approval.

St. Agnes appealed for order. Standing very straight and tall and pale, the candidate finished the speech on which his interest in life depended. He directed himself to the moderate neutrals.

He sat down amid a burst of clapping. The well-drilled Colonel swore. Mr. Brown could be heard declaring that he never in all his life—— The little cripple screamed 'Retract!' Cooper saw the moment for striking, and caught the eye of the burly foreman.

'Sir,' said that chosen champion, rising to his feet, 'may I propose an amendment to this resolution?'

'Certainly, Mr. Hodson,' said St. Agnes.

Once more there was perfect silence.

'Well, it's this. I propose we thank Mr. Henry Willoughby for what he has done for us, and ask him to help the party by standing out this time, and send a message to Lord Charles Brandon——'

Not clapping, but a volley of cheers cut short the nervous speaker, and left his amendment incomplete. Every Brandonite who knew his lesson seemed to lose his head at the mention of the name. St. Agnes held up his hand; Willoughby went a shade paler; the Mayor got on to his feet as a protest. The waverers were duly impressed.

'I must ask gentlemen to allow Mr. Hodson to propose his amendment.'

Mr. Hodson was allowed to do so, and Mr. Brown said four words to second it.

In such a room to speak seemed little less than folly. With every barrier thrown down, and two full floods of party spirit rushing to the collision, none but the courtiers of Canute would have brandished arguments to influence the one side or the other. Yet two friends of Willoughby got up and spoke, and lastly Cooper. For there were other waters than the boiling floods: there were the waverers.

So cool, so orderly of voice and tongue, so smooth to look upon, so seeming blasé in these matters, was the

champion of Brandon that there were not half a dozen present whose chests tightened for sympathy with a player who turned the last card with his fortune on the table.

'The man's an orator,' whispered the neighbour of the Dean.

'No, no,' said he, forgetting all—'a conjurer.'

Leaning most leisurely against the abutting pillar of the fireplace, one foot resting on the fender, one hand in his pocket, Cooper unrolled his master medley of colloquial sophistries, using his natural art of humour. A stranger would have said his speech made no connected whole. A stranger would have failed to realize that every inartistic digression, every aimless revolution, had a potent claim upon some one or other of the listeners. Stroked and stimulated, or at the worst bewildered, they held their breath and listened. Cooper the sentimental was not to be perceived at all. What spoke to them was the expert chef, who after weeks of labour knew the palate of every member of his party at its broadest, waverers and all.

Yet the room danced round him as he rose, and Cooper the sentimental was no further than behind the mask. One moment and he was his own free master; his eyes could wander round and fix the man for whom his soft quip had been prepared, and twinkle in response to the message of success. Again, his own words lost their meaning, for the horror of defeat had sickened him, and for an instant he was insensible to what he said, till one of those hushed throbs of applause recalled him. Blake's warm arm was on his shoulder; Alice's eyes, were flashing soft encouragement; Brandon was at his side beneath the stars, vibrant, conjuring lordship into brotherhood. Back from the stimulus of such visions he would conceive some sudden telling variation of his course, unpremeditated, powerful, perhaps, with a wavering listener.

Now, if ever, should anti-Brandonism have raised itself from the uttermost parts of the earth, and sent its spirit into Cayle. Cricketing ushers should have fallen on their knees, dons should have waved their frantic arms,

matrons have sent their maxims hurtling in the hurricane, practical men have banged their biggest ledgers on the desks ; for now was the hour of peril for anti-Brandonism. The devil had lent his wits to Cooper. What words could do was being done. But all that came to the room from the world outside was the sudden roar of a great crowd booming the name of Brandon. There Dusky had done his work as well as Cooper.

A murmur went round the room, and Cooper brought his speech to an end. Men were too full of expectation to applaud.

Most respectfully they listened while Willoughby's brief defence was spoken. It was never in courage that Willoughby fell short. They heard a resonant voice and saw a strong man fight to save his darling from the lions, purged to his best excellence, because the occasion was direct and great. But Willoughby's speech was a failure. He had chosen all his life a world that was second-hand and unreal, and his penalty was now. But his followers heard the hated mob yelling, and were fired with new loyalty.

St. Agnes added little. Moderate and indifferent, he asked only that they should give their votes for the man who now and at future elections would stand the best chance against the Liberals. And while he argued so the shouts of the crowd were in men's ears.

'Will those in favour of the amendment hold up their hands ?'

There was a grip of eyes on eyes, a compelling of will, a gathering of loyalty.

St. Agnes counted the numbers aloud and marked the figure on a paper.

'Will those against the amendment hold up their hands ?'

It was done. St. Agnes announced the result.

'The meeting is over,' he said ; and he was the first to leave the room where men stood fumbling for their senses, looking on what they had done.

## CHAPTER XXV

BENEATH the chestnut-tree afternoon tea was the means by which four persons clung to sanity.

'These Savoy biscuits have appeared every day for a month,' said Alice, breaking a long pause.

'Oh, please don't have them stopped,' said Venning. 'They're a source of unfailing interest. The Dean makes two mouthfuls of them; Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet splits them down the middle and gives half to her dog; Lady Westshire holds hers between her thumb and her second finger.'

'Then I shall have them stopped,' Alice replied; 'they're spoiling your manners.' She paused. 'I suppose the meeting can't last more than an hour?' she said.

'Rupert said it might not last forty minutes,' said Blake. 'It all depends.'

'Yes, yes,' said Alice hurriedly.

'Roger was in a dreadfully nervous state, underneath all that calmness,' said Venning. 'I only hope he doesn't break down.'

What in the name of Heaven was the good of hoping that? Brandon jerked his head impatiently, and no one answered. All the leader's spirit had deserted him. He lay in a heap in his chair, dull and pale and dank, having spoken scarcely a word since St. Agnes went off to the meeting.

Blake looked at his watch for the sixth time in ten minutes. It was a quarter to five.

'It's quite chilly out here,' Alice remarked, after a moment's silence.

'Can I get you something to put on?' said Blake, springing to his feet with obvious relief.

'Oh, thank you; there is a cloak in the smoking-room.'

'And get me a coat, Dicky, if you're going in,' said Brandon. 'It's beastly cold.'

No one spoke till Blake returned. He put the cloak over Alice's shoulders, and held out a mighty tweed coat for Brandon. Brandon needed an amazing amount of wool in the winter months to keep him comfortably warm. It had been one of his crimes at the private school.

The sexes differ greatly in the virtues that are expected in them, and self-control in the abstract is a predominantly feminine aspiration. As the nerves of this little group grew tighter and tenderer, it was Alice who made the effort to keep up a fiction of normality. She told a little story to please them.

'Charlotte told me that the children at St. Mary's School were all asked who was their favourite King in history. They gave all sorts of answers, and then one boy said King Edward. They asked him why, and what do you think his reason was? He said: "Because he is *my* King."'

'Dear me, that shows a distressingly insular spirit,' said Venning. 'I hope he was well whipped.'

'We must have that boy to dinner,' said Blake.

Alice waited while they pleased themselves with the picture of the little blue-eyed Briton who had stumbled on the ultimate of their own philosophy; then she told the sequel.

'It was the son of old Richter, the man who winds clocks, who can hardly speak a word of English,' she said.

They laughed.

'Even our patriotism we get from abroad,' said Venning.

It could not last, however. A boy in buttons walked across the lawn towards them, and the sight of him set all their nerves agog. What had he? A note? a message?

He addressed Brandon.

'The Earl of Westshire is here in his motor-car, my lord. He wants to know if you will see him, my lord.'

Brandon looked as if a jug of cold water had been thrown over him.

'Oh, damn!' he cried. 'I won't see him! Tell him you can't find me.'

And the boy departed.

'It may be important,' said Alice, gently pleading.

Brandon jerked his face into a scowl and out again, but said nothing.

Again they were silent, but the time was passing. Blake took out his watch for the seventh time.

'Five minutes to five,' he said.

Were they glad or sorry? It sharpened the edge of hope and fear alike. Alice, at least, felt that she could sit there among friends for ever. By themselves they were safe, and she dreaded the sight of any messenger.

'Go out and see what's happening in the square,' said Venning to Blake, thinking to comfort him with employment.

'I'd rather not,' he answered.

To tell the truth, he had not the courage to be alone. There was another interval of itching silence.

'Are these spoons what they call Britannia metal?' said Alice.

'Really, I don't know,' Venning replied, examining one of them with elaborate interest.

'Five o'clock,' said Blake.

How was it going with their fate, with the fate of the glassy-eyed boy who sat huddled in his big coat? Blake got up suddenly and tugged at his waistcoat, shaking himself. He had sat for the first time that day, but he had sat enough. This was becoming fearful.

'What is Britannia metal?' said Venning.

'Some sort of sham silver, isn't it?' Alice answered.

'I don't know how it's made.'

'Send Dickie for a dictionary,' said Brandon, whom they had not thought to be listening to them.

'My God!' murmured Blake.

To him it was all torture. Alice got up and joined him, and led him to walk up and down the lawn.

'Isn't it like Charley,' she said, 'to behave so splendidly just as long as it was necessary, and then to collapse like this?'

'I wish I could collapse too,' Blake answered.

Alice lowered her voice.

'Tell me,' she said: 'how will he be if we have bad news?'

Blake knew very well what Brandon would do if he had bad news. He remembered the night at Oxford when the presidency of the Union was lost for the last time. But he could not explain to Alice. He began to wonder whether they would be able to send her to stay with Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet for the night or with Charlotte St. Agnes.

'Oh, Charley will get back his spirits,' he said. 'The man who'll be hardest hit is Venning.'

They stopped suddenly, for the sound of shouting was beginning in the square.

'Dusky's men,' said Blake.

Alice nodded.

'Will it do any good?'

'Oh, don't ask. Let us wait.'

They walked up and down in silence.

'Oh, but if you knew how much it means,' said Blake, with something in his voice that was not unlike a sob.

'Don't I?' said Alice.

'You don't know what I mean. For years and years that man has trampled on Charley. My God! my God! You must forgive me, but you weren't at Eton and Oxford.'

'When did you first know them?' Alice asked, though she knew it quite well.

'Oh, don't you know the old story? I was quite a small boy. Willoughby was a tremendous blood in the house. Charley was between us. Willoughby was all for improving our morals, and Charley was spotting men here and there, just as he is now, who wouldn't be improved. He used to get out of the house at night, you

know, and one night he came to me. I don't often tell this story, but it's such a good one. He came to my room and sat on a box. I was rather frightened, because I had always heard he was so awfully wicked. I had a tremendous respect for Willoughby and what he said. And Charley began to eat my cake and talk about my pictures, and then sit and watch me without talking at all. Can't you imagine it ?

Yes, Alice could, and she was delighted to have struck a topic that helped them to forget.

'He asked me if I'd go out with him that night and climb a new place he had found. He said he wanted me to, because he was sure I was a sportsman. You know the sort of thing. And I said I wouldn't. I was a pious little brute, and talked a lot of rot. And then—what do you think ?—he sat there and cried. At least, he had great big tears down his cheeks. Just imagine that in a boy who is leading little chaps into bad ways.'

'He was disappointed,' said Alice, 'and he liked you more than you thought.'

'Perhaps he had been down on his luck,' Blake continued, 'and nothing ever hurts him more than losing a man he wants to win.'

'He liked you,' said Alice ; 'that was why he cried.'

'Well, of course, his tears frightened me much more than his wickedness, and I went. I never hesitated again when he asked me other times.'

Alice eagerly maintained the topic. They discussed Charley the schoolboy and Willoughby.

'They had a sort of battle for my soul,' said Blake, laughing, 'which wasn't so particularly pleasant for me. Then came the famous incident of Willoughby's mare's-nest. Don't you know that ? We made him think there was going to be a drinking-party, and he got into a devil of a fuss about it. And when he came to catch us *flagrante delicto*—'

What happened was that he found the brandy-bottles held nothing but a solution for developing photographs, and the cigarette-boxes, when opened, disclosed only photographic plates, for spoiling which he had to pay.

It was certainly a blow for Willoughby's prestige. But Alice heard no further than '*flagrante delicto*,' nor wanted to. Again they had stopped their walk.

'It's over,' said Blake, whispering as though he feared to drown the sound.

The low booming in the square had suddenly changed its tone. It had turned into yells and a crashing of excitement.

They hastened back to the chestnut-tree. Venning had sprung to his feet, but Brandon did nothing. He did not move a muscle. All that he could not check was the creeping colour that returned to his pale face and the strange light that began to play about his eyes.

'Listen, listen! It's coming across the square. Don't go; let's wait for it here.'

Alice said that much, but no one answered her. Brandon threw off his coat and stood biting his lips all round. They waited together, the four of them, like friends, for the great news to burst on them together. Their eyes were fixed on the open window of the smoking-room. It was a matter of seconds; it was a question whether sight or sound would be the first to bring the news. And every instant the tone of the shouting raised their hopes, while the delay of the news-bringers nourished their fears.

Then, through the open window, Dusky Williams, waving his cap, rushed towards them, yelling triumph.

'We've won! we've won!'

Oh, what a sunrise was that for the climbers who had climbed the hill! Triumphant hues were shooting out to the uttermost parts of heaven. Never was Alice lovelier, never was Blake more handsome! And no wonder, for all of them were turning into gods.

'They're coming across, my lady. Come and meet them; let's go and meet them,' said Dusky, who had not heard the facts.

But for the moment there was no power of locomotion. Venning, without excitement, asked dull questions; Alice trembled at the lip; Blake had Brandon by the hands, rained blows upon his back, gripped Dusky by

the shoulder, yelling none cared what — and Brandon, like two dark curtains lifting from this side and from that, his listlessness passed off him. The flush mounted, the boyish pleasure danced in his eyes, and the acceptable smile made sunshine.

‘Here, Dusky, slay me this ruffian; he’ll break my back!’

From that moment he was leader again, but a leader of smiles and graciousness.

‘Dicky, I swear I’ll not be bullied!’

‘Bless my soul! he’s playing the candidate already. Oh, we’ll knock it out of him.’

What were the figures? Dusky had not heard. Mr. St. Agnes was coming across.

They all went into the smoking-room, making their way towards the hall. In the corridor St. Agnes met them. He took both Brandon’s hands, but a horror sat in his eyes. He looked sea-sick.

‘Twenty-two to eighteen,’ he said dully. ‘My God! I saw Willoughby’s face. It will haunt me.’

That was an aspect which had not struck them, and they did not quite know what to say. They were not born in the gutter. The victor himself said the only thing that could be said, low-voiced, his hand still held by St. Agnes:

‘Rupert, what a lot you’ve done for me!’

They went along the corridor to the hall.

‘We owe it to Cooper’s speech,’ said St. Agnes. ‘It was wonderful. I hurried on the voting as fast as I could after he had spoken.’

Already the hall was thick with people. The victorious members of the council were pressing in, and many others — Lord Westshire, Mrs. Pritchard-Martlet, and the grandees of the rifle club. Through the open doors and down the steps the crowd in the square was shouting and singing, and waiting for the conqueror and the speech.

Many pressed round to congratulate and shake hands. None were waverers then. They had hoped for it, all of them, prophesied it, worked for it, gloried in it. It was

the end, and the great beginning. 'You must never leave us, Lord Charles; no desertion, no peerage!' A Babel sounded all over the hall—excited voices, laughter, questions, scraps of narrative. A conversational kaleidoscope whirled round; no two persons spoke together for ten seconds. Yet every torch was dim before the brilliant happiness of Brandon.

Gradually they pushed him through the crowd towards the door.

'You must give them a speech, Lord Charles!'

'Are you ready with a speech, Charley—a speech before dinner?'

'Where's Alice? I won't go out without her.'

'Lord Charles, your hand, your hand. A thousand congratulations!' and so on.

Thus in the forefront of the crazy scene they came out on to the top of the stone steps, and faced the roar that leapt up against them from the crowd as though enthusiasm had formerly but flickered. And thus they stood till the crowd was hoarse—Brandon, Alice, St. Agnes, Blake, Lord Westshire, Venning, and those behind them, in the sparkle of happiness. Nor did Brandon consider a word of the speech he was to make. He stood in radiant animation, a focus of sunshine, laughing talking, watching everything, charmed and charming true not to himself but to the occasion, as was Brandon's way.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

THE thin mist of a January afternoon was lying along the ridge of the Camley Downs among the bare branches of the trees below, chilling the face of the huge red sun that was setting far away on the other side of Cayle. There was no motion in the air ; it was damp to feel, dull to breathe, and gray to see. Beads of wet clung to the rotten signpost at the cross-roads on the ridge, the unsatisfying goal of a woman toiling upwards from the village on the east. It was her half-way point. She carried a bundle, and though she was tired she must walk to Cayle and back. Suddenly came hope. Away to the left a man on horseback, silent on the soft wet slope of the hill, was making for the cross-roads. He was, perhaps, a farmer going to Cayle, perhaps a groom, and anyhow, if the Lord were good, a man whom she could ask to carry her bundle into Cayle. But her hope was short, for the horseman reached the cross-roads long before her. She dared not call. And then it seemed that Providence had interposed, for at the cross-roads where he stood against the sky suddenly the horseman stopped. The woman quickened her pace, straining at hope, praying for the man to turn and see her. But he neither turned nor moved, and when she reached the place he was still there.

She knew him. Timid by reason of the request she had to make, more timid still at seeing to whom she must address it, she made a *détour* round the signpost, and approached him on his flank. Her words perished in her mouth, her feet were rooted to the ground. For she had never seen a man so still and so like stone. Only the kneeling knight in the church at home was like him. He did not see her. She watched him, awed and para-

lyzed, and gazed at him with eyes as fast fixed as his own. But now it was not for his lordly birth, not for his fame, not for his rank as the member of Parliament for the borough of Cayle, that she feared him. 'All stony-like,' she called him, and she was right. A man may well forget his bodily senses when he is in the presence of his soul.

'My lord,' she said, the weight of her bundle thrusting her courage forward.

He turned, and looked at her or through her. He was the people's friend, and if anyone should be accessible to a request like this woman's it was the people's friend. In her distress and weariness she asked the boon, and it seemed to her he did not hear her words. He was so expressionless and still.

Then a little light broke through the mist upon his face; he softened like the dark slope of a Scottish hill as a space of sunshine moves across it. He put out his hand for the bundle, slung it across his saddle, and his smile seemed to the woman like a sight of charity itself. The softness of far-gazing eyes became the softness of kindness.

'That'll be all right,' he said; and with a wave of his hand, smiling again, he dismissed her. He had brought tears to her eyes.

There, as long as she could see him, he remained, a carven man upon a carven horse, gazing down on Cayle. He had a home in Cayle, a house of his own, which he had never had before, and yet he knew that in spirit and in truth he was gazing a farewell. The new life was beginning on the morrow.

In the passing of an instant, in the throb of a pulse, his mind's eye saw the picture of all that Cayle had meant for him. The impious words of his that had lashed the town to fury—the sound of them echoed, but they seemed the words of another man. The great battle and the crash of forces—as one remembers the games of childhood, so he remembered these. The roar and blaze of victory—they had been but the passing taste in his mouth as he drank the enchanted wine that coursed in

his veins this day. So little was all this, so far away, that it seemed but a speck on the field of vision as he sat on his patient horse above the town. He saw the little tricks of craft, enemies stabbed in their backs, the game's rules broken, and these were dots on the horizon. He thought of the tired woman's parcel, and remembered similar deeds of mercy. Like rippling wavelets on the surface of an ocean were these little acts of good and evil. He gazed, and he could scarcely keep them in his vision. The faces of allies in the hour of strife—he saw them standing out like white rocks in the landscape; but what of them in so great an expanse around them? And he saw the future. He saw the crowded days, the little goods and evils like specks of mist, the struggles and triumphs, the mighty width extending outwards over kingdoms, empires, and world forces. But this, even this, was but a portion of his view. Past and future in an instant he could see complete and full, and himself in the midst of them, small as any particle, driven with the whole. But there was more. Neither words nor language could describe it. He could see it, he could grasp it as knowledge, certain, questionable, self-substantiating, true, and neither time nor space was in it. The thin mist glided by him, and the minutes passed and the darkness came as he still sat lost in sight and knowledge. He had no words, he had no thoughts, his eyes were glassy and his lips set fast. The black night shut out even the grass beneath him. But his vision was still clear, for he saw what day cannot lighten nor night obscure.

Slowly he descended the slope of the hill. Music began to fill his head, and after music there came thought and words. He was in Cayle, and the street lights shone and people greeted him. The bundle was delivered, and the warmth of his own house woke his senses. Yet he was glad to be alone. His house was the home of his friends, but they had another home in London, where he had left them. He dined alone. Cooper, whom he had brought from London, had gone to spend the evening with his family.

It was the old palace, an Elizabethan town house deserted by the Bishops, and passed from hand to hand, till St. Agnes bought it as a present for his friend. To furnish it had been the party's hobby through the winter months, with interest centred on the library of the old Bishops that was to be the place of Brandon himself. They lined it with those books that they knew or thought to be his mind's chief food and pleasure. Along the tops of the shelves stood busts of writers and statesmen. Above them were the black panels that pictures would have spoiled. Thick rugs lay about the floor. Great leather chairs were there for the comfort of the party councils of the future, and small tables of oak for tea and tobacco and the evening's drinks.

A huge fire of logs was blazing on the hearth in front of Brandon as he lay in a chair and read. There Cooper found him when he returned.

Cooper had a faculty of receptivity that amounted to genius. He had not been five minutes seated by the fire opposite his friend before the mystic mood of Brandon's last night in Cayle became his own mood too. It was not hard to discover Brandon's mood, for he had a dozen voices, and now he spoke in the softest, lowest, most musical of them all. Blake would have sat on the arm of his chair and shaken him back to a normal state, but Cooper immediately took on the colour of his mood.

'Shall we talk or read, or go to bed?' he asked, when he had told the events of his evening.

Brandon said that they would talk, and Cooper had known that before he asked. So they put out their hands on the past and the future, till memory and prophecy were one idea.

At the end of a long smoke-shaft Cooper threw out a suggestive remark.

'Has it ever occurred to you to think of Alice as a mother?'

'I've done something more than that,' said Brandon; 'I've thought of myself as Uncle Charles.'

Parents had so generally stood for what was hostile and grotesque that there was room for much imaginative

effort in the conception of themselves advanced one step in the ladder of generations. How would the second Charley and Alice regard the first ?

'Think of the sort of way we regard the Dean. Will it be like that ?'

'But we were not brought up by the Dean. I tell you what will happen, Roger. Ten years of those children's lives will be sheer happiness. They'll have the most charming mother any children ever had, and an easy-going, amusing father, supposing Rupert's to be the man, and an uncle who doesn't preach; and then there'll be the devil of a smash. They'll go to school, and find themselves topsy-turvy. You see, they'll hardly know any of the conventional rules of right and wrong. When they find their pastors and masters preaching at them they'll think they've been run into a ruddy lunatic asylum. They'll be the most unpopular boys in the school, and they'll spend all their days being smacked.'

'They'll come through that all right,' said Cooper, 'if they've any guts.'

'Yes, man,' Brandon replied; 'but suppose they haven't? Suppose bullying smashes them up, and smacking turns them into worms? Or suppose they grow up and drink themselves to death, or chuck away all the money?'

It appeared from Cooper's recollection that the Dean had once thought of being a schoolmaster, and Brandon whistled.

'He would have chucked his boys into hell with a pitchfork.'

Such an occupation seemed a curious one for the mild and philosophic Dean. Cooper protested that, had Brandon been his pupil, he would have been near to worshipping the master, and would have received from friendly hands the wisdom for which he had been compelled to fight with tooth and nail. Years of bitterness would have been avoided. Besides, the Dean would have saved a crowd of fine boys from the snares of conventional thought.

'He might have saved one every year,' said Brandon.

'And for every one he saved he would have sent ten to damnation by knocking holes in their armour of conventional stupidity.'

This was the way of thought where Brandon had arrived, the hill from which he looked back on the great battlefield in the after-glow of victory. Here, with the man to whom he could speak freely, he made his *apologia pro vita sua*; and it was an apology in the modern sense, implying an admission. His arrogance had blown itself into humility.

'Don't you see what we've been doing, Roger? We've based all our dealings with men on a gigantic mistake. We thought we could rule and please them by telling them the truth. We thought men liked truth, and tried to found their knowledge on truth. We thought they could be governed by reason. But it was all a huge error. The fact is that men live by conventions, not by truth at all, and by morals, not by reason. Truth and reason could make nothing but gods and beasts. Truth is poison to a man, so is reason, and people loathe them as instinctively as they loathe deadly snakes, because they are afraid of their conventional morality getting blown upon. If we could make men accept our view of things to-morrow we shouldn't have made anything except anarchy. We should have made a terrestrial hell with every modern convenience. The maintenance of civilization depends on nearly all people being fools.'

'So that is why people hate you, Charley?'

'Yes, they're perfectly right. I've lived my life talking the facts and not the conventions, and that's the very devil. It would have served me right if they'd killed me. The Athenians were perfectly right to kill Socrates. The Jews were perfectly right to kill Christ. Every man who tells the truth ought to be killed.'

'If we had lived according to the conventions,' said Cooper, 'you wouldn't be member for Cayle to-day.'

'Yes,' Brandon replied excitedly; 'that's it. Know the truth and use it, but don't talk it. If Christ had held His tongue He could have held His own for years;

but it wasn't His game. His game was to speak out at all costs, so that people might pick up bits of the truth He told. He got Himself killed for it; and we ought to be damned grateful to anyone who'll run the risk of telling the truth and getting hated and killed. But mind you, Roger, that was His game, not ours. We've got to jolly well keep our truth in our cheeks. I'm talking seriously. I'm going to reform; so must you.'

Cooper asked for precise explanations.

'You remember that devil who came to luncheon here, and said the Irish had an abstract right to Home Rule? You remember how Venning took great pains to explain that there wasn't any such thing as an abstract right? Well, that's the way not to do it. That's blurting out the truth. The proper thing would have been to join in the lie, and say that the English have got another abstract right to refuse it.'

So the Brandonite party were to give up plain honesty and take to high principles. That was the leader's word.

'The ideal state is when you have a mass of standardized stupidity, headed by a few men of genius who hold their tongues or only talk in riddles.'

The line of brandy crept lower in the decanter as the hours wore on, and the new policy was developed. The logs on the fire caved in, and were replaced. The cloud of smoke was heavy in the room. On the morrow Brandon was leaving for London. On the Monday he was to dine at Lord Westshire's, to meet the great Commoner under whose romantic banner he was going to enlist. On the next day he would take his seat in Parliament. This was in many senses a last night.

It was one of Dicky Blake's few memorable observations that Charley was a patent appliance for turning alcohol into Imperialism. In Cooper also the spirit of excitement was rising. Into what did alcohol turn in him? as Blake would say. That was the point, and many a time he had marvelled at the self-sufficient strength of other men; for as the glue of daily life relaxed he felt his loosened soul to revolve round the soul of his

friend, nearer, truer, tenderer, madder. So the moon round the earth and the earth round the sun ; but how can the thinker comprehend the force that holds the sun ? The charm of marvel urged him on. He seized his sword and marched himself with Brandon.

‘ So the victory of Brandonism is to end in personal surrender ? Do you know what the Dean said to me ? He said Willoughby would fail because he’d have no friends, and you would fail because you’d have too many enemies. But he said you’d always have friends. Was it by adopting conventionalism that you got those friends ? ’

When Brandon did answer, with a torrent of blind fervour, his words had not the smallest bearing on Cooper’s inquiry.

‘ My God ! what a life we might be leading ! We’ve sat in a damned cathedral town and schemed like curates on a vestry board. Roger, think where we might have been ! Any boy’s book of adventures is better than what we’ve done. We might have been on horseback all day long, sleeping under the stars, in Africa, Tibet, anywhere, where the Empire is young and hot ; out with the trees and beast and no one who was not a sportsman, tried and proved, with danger behind every rock, and work to do, and everything big, big, big. We’d have had our blood going round all day, and our eyes awake, and all our senses alive. We’d have lived our lives. Oh, it kills me, breaks my heart ! ’

He threw himself back in his big chair, the old trick, rubbing his head to disorder against the leather back. It was impossible for Cooper not to smile ; it was impossible for him not to tingle with pure sympathy. He knew there were not four men living to whom Brandon could have spoken so. He chose his words as though he had been talking to a child, knowing that in fact it was something purely child-like that he had to answer.

‘ Come, you didn’t call it a vestry board last September in the middle of the fight. You don’t call it that when you’re riding on the Camley Road past the King of Prussia and above the valley. ’

'Oh, but it's in me,' Brandon said, almost sobbing; 'it's all the same thing.'

Something was said by Cooper about the statesman sitting in a dingy office making destiny and placing his five fingers on the empires. Did not such a man's blood bound? Did he not live?

'I don't know—I don't know,' cried Brandon. 'I know I never understand the Empire except when I've got a horse between my legs. I can't be a statesman at less than twelve miles an hour. Roger, I swear there are times when I hope the big fight will come while I'm still a bit of a boy. It's one thing to write and talk and work the rifle club, but, my God! think of the days when we hear the bullets whizzing and see the devils face to face!'

'But you wouldn't go and be a Tommy,' Cooper urged. 'Your work is different; you can't afford to be shot. Great heavens! we can't spare you; you've got to stay at home and talk and use your brain. That's not a statesman's spirit.'

'You're wrong—you're wrong!' said Brandon.

'But you're going to be the finest speaker living.'

'God! I couldn't speak two words if I didn't want to fight far more than I want to speak.'

There moved a great excitement round them, driving Brandon where it listed, but Cooper it only carried on to seek an answer to the big question and hear from flesh and blood what was the force that kept his sun in place.

'And if we fail?' he said. 'If our life's work crumbles as we touch it? No, I'll not have "damn" for an answer. Tell me, do you never think of failure?'

'The best thing in life is to play and win, and the next best thing is to play and lose,' said Brandon. 'That's Charles James Fox. He said one good thing, though he was a cursed traitor. Do you suppose that was a reasoned opinion? Good God! he knew he'd simply got to play, winning or losing; that's why he said it. Failure is neither here nor there. We've placed our stake, and hedging's the devil.' His tone changed, softening, and

his eyes grew dreamy. 'If you think about it, the sting of failure is scorn and pity. The man you can tell failures to is the friend, the man who won't pity you. I suppose some poor devils can't even tell them to themselves, not without being ashamed. But if the game is big, Roger, if you knew you'd kept up your pluck all through—— Supposing Willoughby had smashed us, couldn't we have walked through Cayle next day, you and I?'

What a question! Cooper would have stood cool in the dock for forgery if Brandon were with him.

'Because we should know it was all right really,' the dreamy adventurer continued. 'It's the fight that matters, not the end. No, by God! though,' he said, breaking out again red hot, 'it's damned unhealthy to talk of failure! It spoils the pleasure; it breaks the pace. The game's enough to keep us going by itself, without thinking of failure or success.'

'What makes you care?' Cooper asked him. 'What keeps you going? What's the real reason for your being an Imperialist? Why don't you want the Germans to get on the top?'

What, in other words, was to Brandon what Brandon was to Cooper?

But it was a question that could not have an answer, as Cooper well knew. All he wanted was a comment.

'Why does brandy make me drunk?' said Brandon. 'Why does a red rag excite a bull? Why does the world go round?'

'Do you know they call you heartless?' said Cooper.

'I suppose that means self-centred,' Brandon answered. 'My God! where does one's self begin and end? Do you know? I don't. Are you part of myself? Is England myself? Is history myself? Was I fighting at Trafalgar?'

'They say you go into drawing-rooms and talk like a political machine, without a human heart. Shall I tell them that every lover has a prattle of his own?'

'Oh, tell them what you like,' cried Brandon. 'I can't explain; I won't. They can make what they like of me. They know a lot more than I do.'

'Like me,' said Cooper, 'they can't understand what is the ultimate force that drives you.'

'No,' said Brandon; 'nor can I.'

Cooper jumped to his feet.

'I'll read it to you, Charley,' he cried, suddenly excited. 'Where is a Bible?'

He found a Bible on the shelves. He stood in the middle of the room, in the silence, with the black panelling around him and above him, amid the books and the significant busts, in the library of the old Bishops. He searched among the pages.

'Here—here it is! listen!

"He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men.

"He mocketh at fear and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword.

"The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield.

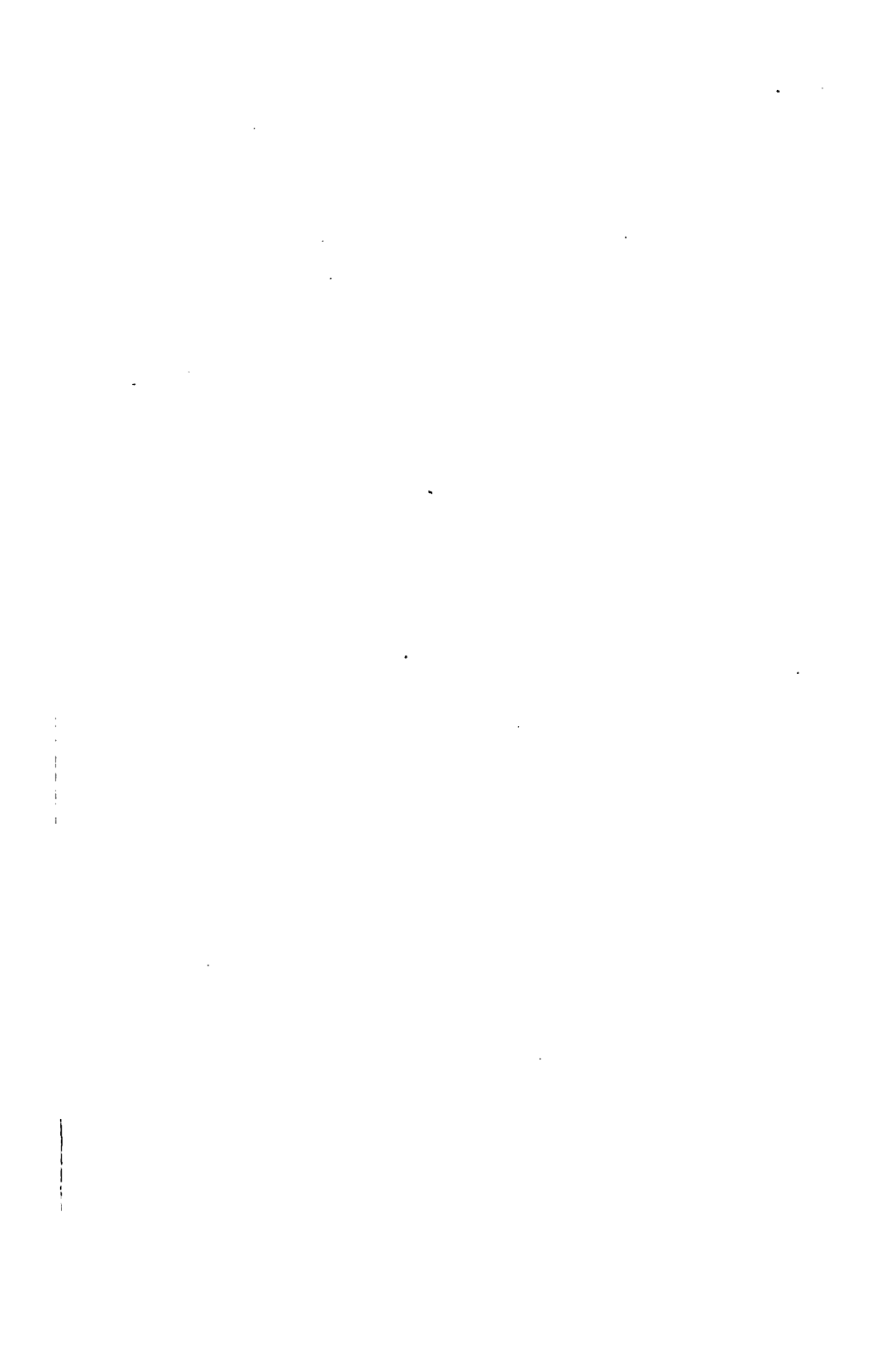
"He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpets.

"He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting."

'The man who wrote that,' said Cooper, 'understood what you mean.'

He looked at Brandon's face, and saw that he liked it.

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